



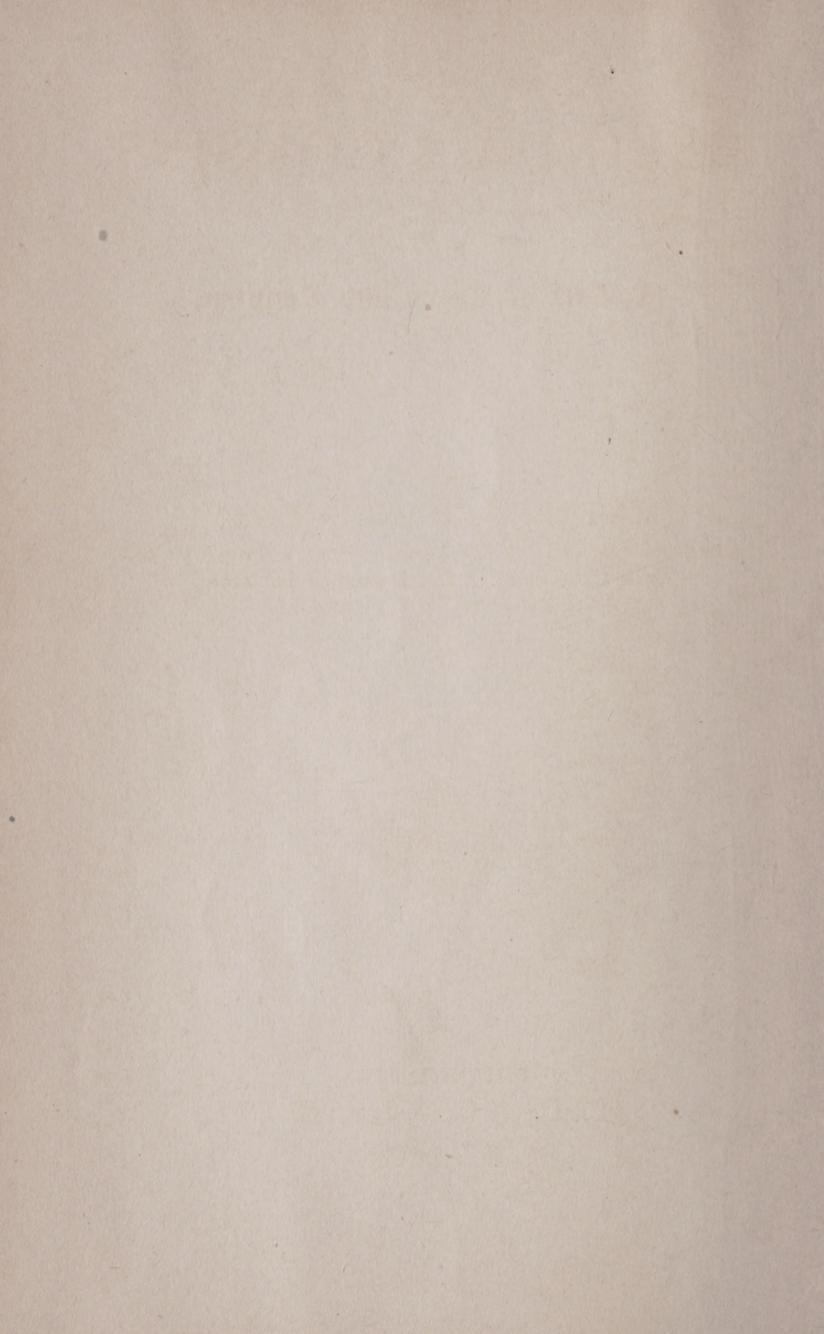
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BELINDA'S COUSINS

A Tale of Town and Country.

BY

MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

Author of "Belinda," "The Watson Girls," "Jasper Thorn,"

"Jack Chumleigh," "The Legend of Lancianus,"

"In a Brazilian Forest," Etc., Etc.

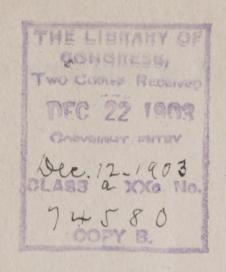


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THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO THE

GRANDDAUGHTER OF A NOBLE WOMAN,

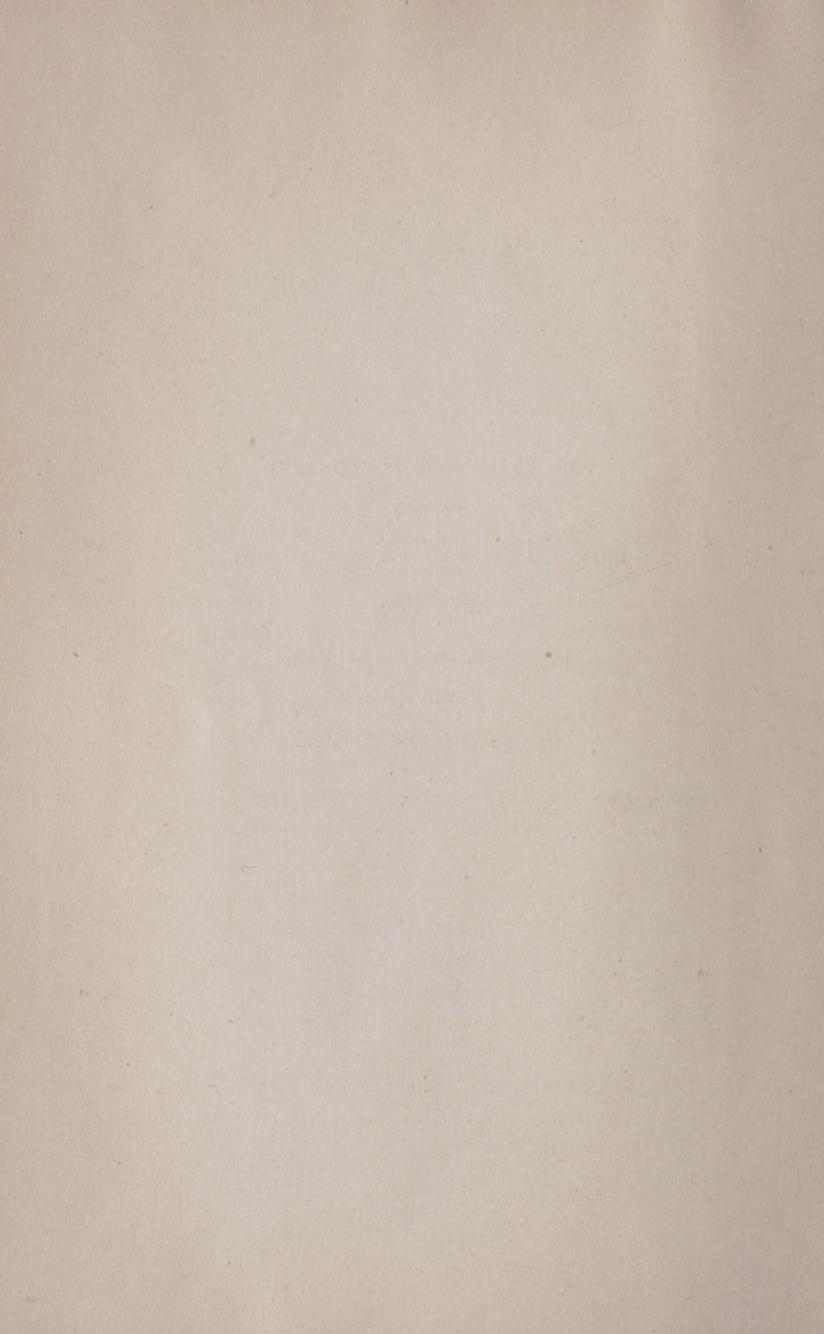
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OF BROOKLYN AND BELMAR,

BY

HER FRIEND THE AUTHOR.

October, 1903.



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BELINDA'S COUSINS.

I.

LAST DAYS AT SCHOOL.

BELINDA'S dear grandmother grew ill while she was away at the convent. Belinda reached Capitol Hill just in time to receive her blessing, and she died in peace, not knowing what was in store for her darling. A short time after Mrs. Murray's death, Uncle Joe passed away, and then it was discovered that the fortune which he had invested in a silver mine had vanished as the smoke of burning leaves in the autumn,—but not leaving even a haze behind.

Frederick Murray had recovered his health and gone back to Annapolis, so that the loss did not make so much difference to him. He was wretched

about it for Belinda's sake. He determined to end his career in the Navy and come out to work for her; but she would not have it so. In a few months she would be graduated. She could teach music, and support herself in that way until he "got through" the Naval Academy, and then he could help her,—but not until then.

"You will do no good, if you come out, dear old boy. Of course it would be nice for us to live in the old house on Capitol Hill, and go to the Terrace to see the sunsets, and listen to the Marine Band in the summer, or to live cosily in a little flat in New York; but, remember, Fred, I know what it is to be poor. You don't. You'd waste days hunting work which you would not know how to do, if you got it,-for you know only how to be a sailor man. In the meantime, I'd starve elegantly, like a lady. No; make your career,—and I'll do my best, with God's help. I'm a Southern girl, as you say, but I don't see why a Southern girl should be more ashamed to work than a Northern girl,—do you? Some time ago, Mrs. Deresby, who is in some way related to us, asked me to visit her. I'll go as soon as the school closes, and see what my chances are as a

music teacher. The dear, good, sweet, generous Sisters want me to stay here;—but this isn't the world, and I must face the world.

"If things don't go well there, I shall go to the Laffans',—Mrs. Laffan was mother's cousin, you know. I really didn't know this until I met Marguerite at school. She will be graduated in my class,—and she is a fine girl,—so kind, so good, so unspoiled. She has great executive power, she ought to be a queen.

"Amélie, you know, is still in France, and the Watsons are in the country,—I shall write to them all. I wish you would, too. Things must come right, if we do our best."

The Deresby invitation had been to the rich Belinda, not to the poor Belinda, and she soon found this out. Then, with great sadness in her heart, she wrote to Marguerite. The next day she received a telegram from Mr. Laffan. It simply said,—

"Come home as soon as you can."

There came a long, cordial letter from Mr. Laffan, and a note from Marguerite:—

"Dear, sweet, kind, altogether-lovely Belinda, no matter how kind the Deresbys are, come at once. I need your advice and help. I will tell all." Then followed sixteen pages, perfumed with lavender.

School over in June, Marguerite Laffan had made up her mind about many things. She had determined that she would take the housekeeping under her direction, and put some style into it; she had determined that she would civilize her brother Aloysius, and that there should be no dogs about the house.

She had thought a great deal about these things. She was supposed to be one of the most brilliant girls in the graduating class; she was just over sixteen, and she had almost won the right of reading the valedictory. People said this was a great honor for a girl of her age. She read, however, a paper on "Woman's Mission in the Nineteenth Century." She made up her mind that her mission was to make home happy by making Aloysius a gentlemanly boy, and by banishing his pigeons and dogs. Marguerite had, indeed, given up her first intention of following a post-graduate course, in order to improve her home. Her mother was an invalid, and the girl resolved to devote her life to those ideas of happiness which

she had drawn from books and partly from her aunt's conversation. Her aunt was Mrs. Goldwaite Gillflory, who lived on the fashionable side of Chicago, and who sometimes visited Marguerite.

Aloysius had always been a great trial to his sister. She loved him very much; but she had never had great pleasure in his company, because he was always with Prince; and Marguerite disliked Prince.

Aloysius—he was generally called "Al"—was not beautiful. Marguerite would have forgiven this if he had been "stylish." He was stumpy and sunburned; he had big ears, which, as his hair was closely cropped, stood out from his head like wings; his stockings were never gartered, or if one was gartered, the other was not. His pockets always bulged; he dragged his feet when he walked; his English was bad; he would say "avenoo" instead of "avenue," and "bloo" instead of "blue." This grieved Marguerite very much. And, then, he had a bad habit of calling out, "She don't know nothing," that almost curdled the blood in her veins. Sometimes he washed his face in streaks, and sometimes he did

not wash it at all. He was twelve years old. The other brother, Fred, was seven. She did not worry much about him; he was the baby of the family, and Marguerite made up her mind that she could easily manage that little darling.

"Of course I love Aloysius," observed Marguerite to her Cousin Belinda, as they sat, hand in hand, on a bench on the lawn, after the Commencement exercises were over; "but I cannot esteem him as I ought. My aunt, on my father's side, Mrs. Gillflory—she goes into the best South Side society in Chicago,—tells me that he is awful; and Peggy Gillflory, my cousin, says that she feels that I ought to do something to bring my poor father and mother out of the condition into which they have been dragged by my brother."

"But he is so young."

"A boy ought to begin to be something at twelve. Montaigne learned Greek at seven, and Julius Cæsar—dear me, I forgot to say good-bye to Sister Clement. I shall never forget her,—never. And, O Belinda," said Marguerite, "you know how I feel in giving up my post-graduate course for my family."

"I should like to stay, too," said Belinda, with a sigh. "I must teach music at once. If poor uncle had not died,—but, as it is, I ought to be thankful that he left me the means of getting a living. 'Work is the word,' as Sister Clement said. I will be cheerful, no matter what happens."

"I shall be cheerful if things go right," said Marguerite. "I almost envy you your plunge into the world. As it is, I feel my responsibility. I suppose I shall have to go into society, too, for Al's sake and papa's. You know mamma never goes out."

"Society," said Belinda. "Why, Marguerite, you are not old enough for that, are you? And Al—"

"Aloysius, if you please."

"I thought you said Al—Aloysius is not old enough for society."

"My aunt says," replied Marguerite, smoothing down her muslin dress, "that society polishes a boy more than anything else. And, then, one must make social connections for him. His are very low, I am afraid. I know my duties, dear. But don't let the thought of them make you

sad," she added, solemnly kissing Belinda on the forehead.

"Sad!" exclaimed Belinda. "If I were going home to a dear father and mother I should not be sad. If you were an orphan like me."

"Ah, Belinda," answered her companion, "you have only yourself to look after: I have others."

"Aloysius and—a dog," remarked Belinda, smiling a little.

Marguerite looked at her reproachfully. Then she gathered up her fan, her various souvenirs, and her flowers, and rushed into Sister Clement's arms.

An hour later she was seated beside her father in the train for home. She made Belinda promise to visit her soon. Her father looked at her approvingly. In her quiet, dark, convent-made frock, with her hair rippling a little over her forehead, not in "Pompadour," under a neat little hat, she hit his taste exactly.

"You will be a great comfort to us all, my dear," he said, softly.

"Of course I shall, papa," she answered, smiling at him.

It was hard to give up the post-graduate course,

Marguerite thought; but just lovely to have a father for whom one could sacrifice so much. She looked at the girl in front of her, and thought of her large hat and ribbon streamers with some dissatisfaction. She felt herself to be very plain.

II.

AT HOME,

MR. LAFFAN'S house was not imposing. It was comfortable and large enough. It stood in Rosevale, a small town within easy distance of Chicago. There was a good lawn in front of it, and a big garden behind it. Over the brown timber of the house ivy and running roses and wall-flowers and clematis intermingled. Mrs. Laffan liked the thick vines, which were the homes of innumerable birds; and Mr. Laffan approved of them, because they saved the painter a great deal of work,—for nobody could see whether the house had been painted or not, so thick were the vines.

The garden at the back was filled with oldfashioned flowers. There were dwarf-pear and apple trees and a grapevine arbor. But the most important thing in this garden was a small white house, with Grecian pillars in front of it. There Prince and Al's other dogs lived. On the roof of this house was a place for the pigeons.

A carriage was waiting for Mr. Laffan and his daughter at the station. On the front seat with the driver was Aloysius, his straw hat rather the worse for wear, and, as usual, one stocking hanging about his ankle. Marguerite tried to kiss him, but she succeeded only in hitting her nose against the rough straw of the brim of his hat, for he dodged his head. He did not like to be kissed.

"Why, Mag," he said, "how big you've grown. You're almost a young lady."

"Am I?" said Marguerite, rather pleased.
"Do you think I have changed? You have grown, too."

"I should think I have. Why, I am first base of the R. R. V. Nine, and I can 'do' anybody of my size with one hand."

"Just lift that traveling bag into the carriage," said his father," and jump up quick. Marguerite must want her supper."

They drove quickly through the country. They passed the wheat fields and the little houses, with their sentinel sunflowers and hollyhocks, and

at last stopped in front of the vine-covered cottage.

"Welcome home," said her father, kissing her again, as he lifted her out of the carriage. She ran at once to her mother's room. Her mother sat in a big arm-chair waiting for her. Mrs. Laffan cried a little, kissed her daughter and the beautiful graduating medal many times. She looked better than usual, and had actually walked across the room twice, in spite of the inflammatory rheumatism that had held her captive for so many years.

"You will be such a comfort to us," said her mother, repeating the kind words of Mr. Laffan.

Marguerite uttered a scream; she had trodden on something that bounded up from under her mother's chair like a big India rubber ball.

"It's only Fred," said Mrs. Laffan. "Fred, do behave yourself. Here's Marguerite."

Marguerite screamed again; for the small boy that had suddenly appeared from under the table was accompanied by a hideous animal—a dog that looked like a sausage. It was fat and there was no hair on its body; it looked odd to say the least.

Marguerite forgot her good manners and kicked at it. The small boy frowned, put his fingers in his mouth and began to howl, with his big blue eyes fixed on his sister. The strange dog began to yelp, too.

"Go kiss your sister, Fred," said his mother.

Fred wept louder. "She kicked Morfido,—she did, she did," he exclaimed, tears now streaking his cheeks.

Marguerite blushed deeply. Suppose Sister Clement or anybody should hear that speech.

"Come to me, Fred," she said, soothingly.

"What did you bring me?" demanded Fred, coming nearer. "I want a gun; I want a pistol; I want a watch that you can wind up as often as you like and it won't break."

Marguerite had to confess that she had not thought of anything. Then Fred threw himself on the floor, in the deepest grief. He rolled and rolled about, Morfido rolling with him, and the air was filled with sobs and yelps.

In the meantime, Aloysius had washed himself and put on his best suit of clothes. Prince had been scrubbed early in the morning, and Aloysius put a new collar on him. Aloysius was glad that Marguerite had come home, although he did not like girls, as a rule. But he had made up his mind to be nice to her if she liked dogs and pigeons. So far she had not made a bad impression on him. She had kissed him, to be sure; but, of course, girls could not help that sort of foolishness. If Prince took to her, she must have something good in her after all. Bob Taylor's sister had made his Floss a big red ribbon bow for the dog race; perhaps Mag might make Prince a blue one. There were many things a girl could do,—and, poor things, Aloysius thought, it was well they were worth something.

Prince was a Scotch terrier. The end of his tail had been nipped off in battle, and one eye was closed, owing to another battle. His coat looked glossy and yellow after scrubbing; but, as a rule, it was very dim and dingy looking. His good eye had a very sharp look, and Aloysius understood well the language of the tail.

"Try to like her, Prince," his owner whispered to him, as the bell for supper rang. "She's only a girl, but do try to like her."

III.

THE FAMILY DINNER.

MARGUERITE'S first evening at home passed off fairly well. She did not approve of tea, which was served by Hannah in rather a rustic fashion. There was an enormous plate of stewed meat for the boys, dry bread and some mineral water for her father, and rolls and marmalade and tea for herself. A stiff bunch of double hollyhocks decorated the table; and Hannah walked in and out as she pleased, rebuking the boys or making remarks to Mr. Laffan, who, as a dyspeptic, took his frugal meal very slowly.

"I hope you like the marmalade, Margie," said Hannah; "it's real Scotch. They can grow oranges in this country, but they canna' make marmalade in this country. I opened the last pot for you, child. I'll wager you never had marmalade like that at the convent."

Marguerite made a face; she disliked marma-

lade, though the boys, to use Hannah's words, "wallowed" in it.

"Dear me, but you're a brave girl," Hannah said, standing over her. "I missed you so much last vacation. Indeed I've oft been thinking that your aunt's was no place for you. She's just that stuck up and overpowering that she's no companion for you, a young girl. We've all been a-wearing for you,—Master Fred," she broke off sharply, "you're not to feed the dog from the table. I won't have the cloth mussed up by his paws,—I won't that, now. You may drop a wee bit of the meat on the floor,—just a wee bit on the oil-cloth under your chair; but it's not manners to have the beastie eating off the cloth itself."

Fred grinned at Hannah with all the impishness that a small boy can put into a grin; and Hannah turned away to give a similar reprimand to Aloysius, who was just in the act of holding a bone over Prince's head.

Marguerite looked at her father; but he silently munched his bread and drank his water, taking no notice of the boys.

"Master Aloysius," cried Hannah, striking Prince's head with her apron, which she rolled for the moment into a sort of a rope. "You'll soil the tablecloth. When I lived with Mr. Sawyer, at the manse in the country, he'd have brained little Davie if he did what you are doing. Ah, Davie was a good child, and he's a great man in India to-day!"

"Are there Indians in India, Han?" asked Fred, giving Morfido's head a push.

"There are no red Indians, they're just natives of India," said Hannah, forgetting her wrath. "Keep your fingers out of the sugar, Master Fred! Don't you see the spoon?—And they are poor, benighted pagans, Margie."

"I know, Hannah," said Marguerite, glad to have a chance of improving the boys' minds. "It was the idea of converting them that made Columbus cross the ocean to America. Just think, Fred, he started for India, and found himself in America!"

"How foolish!" said Fred. "If papa would give me a ship of my own, I'd know where to go."

Marguerite looked disgusted, and pushed Prince away, as he was attempting to put his tongue into her saucer. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Marg Laffan," cried Aloysius, "to hit a poor dawg that can't talk! I should think the Sisters would have taught you better."

"They would have made you say dog and not 'dawg,'" she replied, with a superior air; "and taught you that the table is no place for dogs."

"Popper! popper!" wailed Fred. "Is Marg Laffan to interfere with us? Who is my boss, Hannah or Marg?"

Mr. Laffan squirted some more mineral water from his syphon, and sighed.

"What are they fussing about, Marguerite?" he asked. "I declare I have been thinking so deeply that I have paid no attention. Things are not so cheerful as they used to be, my dear. Your mother can't come down to her meals and Hannah does just the best she can. But I know you'll make us all more cheerful. And I'm so glad you're not a young lady, but just a nice, simple-minded little girl. Trust the Sisters for keeping you nice and kind and young."

"Aunt Gillflory thinks the convents are too simple. She says that girls intended for society ought to have more aplomb." Aloysius and Fred giggled.

"More what?" asked Mr. Laffan. "I declare, I have forgotten what little French I knew!"

"Oh, more self-assertion, more knowledge of the world!"

"Ah," said Mr. Laffan. "Your Aunt Gillflory was always queer."

"Daft, I should say," put in Hannah, coming in with her plate of hot rolls. "What with her airs and her graces, your sister, sir, is more like a pagan than a self-respecting Christian."

Mr. Laffan sighed. "The house needs discipline, my dear," he said. "But don't mind Hannah; she has always had her way. I'm sure, my dear, you'll make us all more cheerful; and," he said, with a laugh, "perhaps you can do something for the boys' manners. I am too busy to look after them."

Marguerite smiled. "The mission of woman," she had said in her essay, "is to elevate at the cost of any sacrifice."

"We really ought to have a new dinner set, papa," she said, looking at the cracked plate.

"That's right!" said her father. "Order it.

I knew you'd see our defects. But don't be too hard on the boys."

Marguerite ran around to her father's chair and kissed him. He smiled, and went into his study.

"You needn't mind liking her, Prince," said Aloysius to the Scotch terrier, as they ran races on the lawn after tea; "she will never suit us."

IV.

LETTERS.

MARGUERITE looked into her mother's room.
All was silent.

"Do you want me, mamma?" she asked.

"No," said a weak voice,—"not if you have anything else to do."

Marguerite hesitated. Should she give up her letter-writing to stay with her mother? Her mother could wait; and she must write to Mrs. Gillflory and Belinda. It would not make much difference; she would be with her mother all summer.

She went up to her room. It was neat and clean and rather bare. There were none of the pretty ornaments that young girls like: no blue and white toilet-table, or knots of ribbons or silver-framed photographs. The room was severely white, a rug on the carefully scrubbed floor, and a little iron bedstead. A shelf near the

door held a holy-water font. There was a picture over the mantelpiece representing a sinful soul in flames. Hannah, who was a devout Scotch Catholic, was very fond of this picture, and she had put it into Marguerite's room as a special mark of regard. Marguerite opened her own desk—a pretty thing given to her by Aunt Gill-flory,—and patted it affectionately. She drew from her trunk some delicate note-paper, and began to write to her aunt.

"I have found things, my dear aunt, much as you described them to me. Two years ago I was too young to notice much; and, then, at school everything is so simple—there is such an absence of style—that I did not understand how rude our life was at home. Since I visited you I began to understand how people ought to live. My father and mother are lovely, but the boys will need a great deal of my attention. I shall begin to teach Aloysius French to-morrow, and induce him to part with a shocking dog, which actually eats off the table. Fred has another beast, which I shall send away too. Well dressed, my brothers would look well enough, though, dear Aunt

Gillflory, they have none of the Laffan beauty. Aloysius wears no cuffs, and I found a vile piece of chewing-gum pressed under the table at tea. Happily, he does not smoke; he says cigarettes are only for dudes. Fred has nice blue eyes and the funniest bang; his nose is freckled, and when he wrinkles it up he almost frightens me. At tea he put his fingers in his mouth and widened it so dreadfully that I almost screamed. We sometimes think that the minims at the convent are impish; but no little girl can possibly be so awful as a small boy. He knows what you are thinking about, and he grins at you!

"I shall do my best to brighten up this afflicted home. I know that I cannot be a St. Catherine, or a Vittoria Colonna, or a Fabiola; but I shall strive to be a social star like you, and bless with my cheering rays all about me. There were no finger-bowls at the table, and papa said that I might order a new dinner set. I feel that I have begun well. I should paint one myself, if I had the time; but I must give up art and literature and society for our dear family. I need a 'rat'; and if you will send me a hair-curler that will not burn the hair, I shall be obliged. I don't

care for dress, but papa and Aloysius will expect me to look like other girls. Sacrifice comes easy, if we practise it. We have tea at six, just as we did at the convent. I shall change that, and have dinner at seven as you do. More later.

"Your affectionate niece,

"MARGUERITE."

Having put some light blue wax on the envelope and sealed this letter, she took up her pen to write again to Belinda Murray.

"I am home at last, my dear Belinda—what a queer, old-fashioned name you have! It makes me think of the great, tall, stiff hollyhocks that grow by our garden gate; or the larkspur, or the white pinks, or the China roses. It is so prim and so like you!

"I am dashing off a few lines to you, in the hope that you will do the same. My brothers are anything but cultured. I wish you could see them; but you, with your gentle ways, would never get on with them. They need firmness. I shall change them in a week or so. Our lawn is beautiful for a party. I shall give one soon, because I must represent papa socially, and Aunt

Gillflory tells me that his family and position are better than anybody's here. If you saw my brothers you wouldn't think they had any blue blood in them; though I must say Fred has a certain something about him—when his face is clean. Write soon. Good-bye!

"MARGUERITE LAFFAN,
"E. de M."

V.

MARGUERITE'S THREAT.

HANNAH had grown old in the service of the Laffans, and she had long become accustomed to having her own way in the kitchen. She scolded the boys and the dogs, but they did not mind her. Mr. Laffan had the opinion that many things about the house could be changed for the better; and he hoped that Marguerite would know how to do this by managing Hannah.

Marguerite ran lightly into her mother's room, after she had finished her letters, to bid her goodnight.

"Ah, my dear," her mother said, as she raised her hands to her eyes, as if even the shaded light in the bedroom were too strong for them, "I am so glad you are at home! The household needs you very badly. There may come a time when I shall be well again; but just now it is a heavy task I have to lay on such young shoulders. Your

brothers may try you a little, but patience will do much. And, as your father said to me only a few moments ago, you can get Hannah to do anything if you show her a little kindness. Old people like the young to be fond of them, my child."

"Oh, I shall manage Hannah, never fear! Aunt Gillflory has taught me many things about the management of servants."

Mrs. Laffan was silent. "Still, Margery, you must remember that Hannah has the position in many ways of a privileged friend. Your aunt's servants are very different. But I am sure a little experience, joined with the lessons of your dear convent, will clear the way for you. Hannah has been very faithful all these years."

"She was paid for it," said Marguerite, unconsciously quoting her aunt.

Mrs. Laffan took her daughter's hand in hers.

"No money can pay for such service as hers has been."

"Absurd!" Marguerite said, under her breath.

"A servant is a servant."

"The boys will try you a little, I repeat; and until I get better you will have to look after

papa's comfort. I fancy that if you would learn to make some nice dishes, he would give up those dreadful mineral waters, which make him ill. Did you learn to cook at school?"

"Oh, yes!" said Marguerite. "I can make the loveliest lady locks—the kind of cakes that Hannah calls maids of honor,—and méringue pie. I never cared for plain cooking, though Sister Clement scolded and scolded."

"Ah! well—perhaps at home you will find something to please your dear father. And now good-night. You will read to me sometimes, dear?"

Marguerite smoothed her mother's pillow, kissed her tenderly, and then ran down to the study, where her father sat bending over his law papers.

"Glad to see you, little girl!" he said. "Your mother seems better than ever since you came home. We shall have pleasant times together,—all of us. The boys are not so well mannered as they might be, but a sister's influence in a house is everything; and I am sure they'll soon learn to imitate your manners. Dear me, how delightful it is to have one's own little girl at home

again! I wonder if every father is as fond of his little girl as I am of you, Margery?"

Marguerite sat on the side of her father's chair, and put her arm about his neck. He pushed the green shade up from his eyes and folded his papers.

- "Talk about yourself. Had you many particular friends at school?"
 - "Only one: my cousin Belinda."
- "A fashionable girl?" asked her father, with a sound of doubt in his voice.

Marguerite laughed. "You ought to see Belinda. She is pretty; no style about her at all. Indeed, papa, the Sisters do not let any girl be fashionable very long."

- "God bless them!"
- "Belinda wants to earn her living teaching music."
- "We'll see to that," said Mr. Laffan. "There's plenty of room. She could help you to manage the house. I'm afraid you'll be lonely."

Marguerite laughed again. "Why, Belinda wouldn't be of the slightest use; she would just spoil the boys. I'd like to have her; but she must earn money, you know."

Mr. Laffan brightened. "Of course. Let her teach music to the boys. Al has a voice,—at least, I hear it often enough. A little money spent that way would not be wasted."

"The boys would just walk over her. She'd be as fond of those horrid dogs as they are in no time. Besides, papa, Aunt Gillflory—"

"Never mind," said Mr. Laffan, frowning.
"Your aunt's way of living is very different from ours. The Sisters are safer advisers for you than she is. And I am glad you prefer this quiet Belinda to that showy Gillflory girl."

Marguerite blushed.

"I have always regretted," he continued, "that you spent your last two vacations at my sister's. Her life is not the peaceful, contented, simple life that ours ought to be."

Marguerite was silent. She heard murmurs without the door. She turned, and two figures in nightgowns sprang up the stairs. Fred was sucking his fingers, which had recently been thrust into a barrel of brown sugar in the cellar; and Aloysius had half a dozen of Hannah's cookies stowed under his arm.

"Did she see us?" whispered Fred.

"I don't know. If she tells, I'll——" here Aloysius danced on the step, and shook his fist at the study door.

Marguerite put her head out. "Go to bed, children, or I shall be obliged to punish you," she said. "Good-night, papa! Don't stay up too late."

"Punish us!" whispered Aloysius. And Fred made a motion as if he were scalping an Indian.

VI.

MARGUERITE IS FIRM.

ALOYSIUS and Fred were early risers; so were Prince and Morfido; so were the pigeons, and the three black puppies, and the two yellow ones. Marguerite heard them under her window. She had determined to have a long sleep; but Fred's shouts, Aloysius' songs, the yelping of the dogs, and the whir of wings passing her window, awakened her.

She looked out of her window. There seemed to her good reason why the dogs should yelp. They were harnessed to an empty box on wheels, in which Fred sat. The steeds were very unequally matched, Morfido, the Japanese dog, being much smaller than Prince. He was determined to turn around in his harness and to roll over; while Prince would not move at all, in spite of all Fred's urging.

Marguerite, horrified, put her head out the front window.

- "Fred!" she exclaimed. "Why are you so cruel?"
- "Who is cruel?" asked Fred, showing his teeth in one of his grins.
 - "Why, you!"
- "I am not crool," said Fred. "You're another. Al, she's calling me names!"

Aloysius came from behind the hedge of arborvitæ which separated the garden from the stable yard. His head and shoulders were covered with pigeons, while his two favorite white ones stood on his outstretched arms.

- "Who is calling you names, Fred?"
- "She!" cried Fred, beginning to bawl at the top of his voice.
- "I'll tell papa!" exclaimed Aloysius. "It is bad enough for boys to fight. But I think a girl had better be saying her prayers than making her little brother cry so early in the morning."

Hannah appeared at this moment, with her apron full of strawberries; and Fred, sure of sympathy, began to bawl louder than ever. Prince sat on the ground, and Morfido rolled over and

over, until he was hopelessly entangled in the white string which Fred used for reins.

- "O Hannah! Hannah!" wailed Fred.
- "Poor deary! poor deary! What is the matter?" asked Hannah.
- "She!" yelled Fred; while large tears, which always appeared at the slightest notice, rolled down his cheeks.

Hannah looked about her in perplexity.

"Marg said something to him," said Aloysius:
"she called him names."

Hannah looked up at the window, from which Marguerite had disappeared.

- "She might have something better to do," Marguerite heard Hannah say.
- "Am I crool?" wailed Fred. "I haven't done anything. That's what Hannah says when I kill flies. I didn't kill a fly this morning."
- "Never mind her," said Aloysius. "She thought you were hurting the dogs. You can't hurt dogs; but girls don't know."

Aloysius went back to the stable with the pigeons. Fred disentangled Morfido, dried his tears, and began to urge on his steeds again.

Marguerite said her prayers, but she felt that the day had opened badly. She reddened as she remembered Hannah's tone. Well, she would soon teach her not to make such remarks. She would bring the boys to terms, and drive those horrible dogs out of the house. She tied a blue ribbon in her hair, and looked at herself in various attitudes in the glass, even after the breakfast bell had rung. Her father was waiting for her.

Hannah, with a cloud on her brow, brought in the coffee. Marguerite took her mother's place at the table.

- "Dear me!" she said. "Aunt Gillflory always has a silver urn."
- "Did you see mamma yet?" her father asked, not hearing her remark.
- "Oh, I forgot!" she said. "I'll just run upstairs now."
- "And keep breakfast waiting?" said Hannah sharply. "The coffee—the best in the land, if *I* do say it—will be spoiled."
- "Mother will like to see you every morning, dear," her father said, gently.
 - "I will be sure to remember, papa," she replied.

"Oh, just look at that boy's hands! I don't believe you washed them before you came to the table, Fred."

Fred looked at his hands, which were gray—almost black, in fact, like late twilight.

"Leave the table!" said his father; "and do not come back until you look like a gentleman. Do you hear, sir?"

Fred opened his mouth, and let out a roar that almost made the table tremble; but he obeyed. Marguerite heard him say in the kitchen to Hannah: "She's at me again!"

Aloysius scowled; and when Hannah brought in the toast she gave Marguerite "one of her looks." After a time Fred returned, somewhat less artificial in color, showing that Hannah had used soap and water freely. When his father was not looking, he rolled up balls of bread and aimed them at his sister. She appeared to take no notice of them.

"Firmness," she said to herself. "I will be firm. Aunt Gillflory is always firm."

She did not draw attention to the deficiencies of the breakfast table, but she determined to ask her father for enough money to put everything into more elegant condition; and then she would have her lawn party.

After her father had gone, she summoned her brothers to her room; but they did not deign to come. They laughed and danced on the porch.

VII.

HOW THE DOGS FELT.

IT seems to me if people understood dogs properly, there would be less trouble in the world. If boys and girls would sometimes try to learn lessons from dogs, they would be the better for it. St. Francis of Assisi understood animals better than any other man that ever lived; and they understood him. You know how he preached to his little sisters the birds, and how they flew about him and perched on his shoulders. And you know, too, how the wolf of Gubbio listened to him, and made up his mind not to eat little children as soon as he told him it was wrong; and that he gave St. Francis his great paw, and shook hands with him as a token of repentance.

Now, it seems to me that if Marguerite Laffan had thought less of herself and more of the animals around her, she would have escaped some trials.

Morfido was not beautiful. He certainly was like a fat sausage mounted on four legs, and his eyes were very like black beads. But, then, as Fred said, he had his feelings. It is true that Prince's tail was not beautiful, as the tails of some Scotch terriers are; but his one eye was a clever and knowing eye. Marguerite might have understood these things. Sister Clement had often sighed over what she called Marguerite's want of consideration. Other people might have called it selfishness, but Sister Clement was too charitable for that.

Mrs. Laffan was anxious that the house should become more orderly; and she hoped that Marguerite would make it so, and also teach the boys some things. She was not well enough herself to do much, and so the boys and the dogs—principally the dogs—had become the real rulers of the house.

Some people may blame Prince and Morfido for taking a place that did not belong to them. It may be said that dogs have no business to put themselves on the parlor cushions all the time, or to hang to the table by their paws during meals. But dogs are like children in that respect. If

you give them a foot which they ought not to have, they will take a mile when they get a chance. Even Hannah did not dare to interfere with them. It was her private opinion that Morfido was "a snake" and "a pagan." And while she looked on Prince with a certain affection because he was Scotch, she did not approve of his manners. But she had never dared to say much against the dogs, since they belonged to her darling boys.

Prince saw very soon that Marguerite did not like him, and he knew that she did not like him because he was ugly. Prince was rather inclined to be nice to Marguerite. He had once known a girl who made the best fishballs he had ever tasted, and he first thought that Marguerite might be that kind of girl. He soon found out, to his sorrow, that she was not. He would not have minded that so much, had he not seen by her eyes that she disliked him because he was ugly. After this he snarled whenever she passed him. Morfido, who had a good heart in his Japanese way, was disgusted when she called him a "nasty beast," and hit him with the stick of her umbrella.

Prince and Morfido noticed these things, and thought a great deal about them as they lay during the afternoons on the embroidered cushions of the parlor sofa. Perhaps they did not think: one cannot be sure whether dogs think or not; but, at least, they know a great many things,—and if animals do not think, how were the birds and the wolf and the lambs able to understand St. Francis of Assisi? If we were good enough, the animals would understand us well enough. They know what a little baby is saying, don't they? So, while Marguerite was making her plans, and thinking of Prince and Morfido as if they were mere brutes, the dogs were noticing her a great deal.

The boys had been disappointed in their sister. She proposed that all the pigeons should be killed and sold; she refused, too, to lend Fred a silk handkerchief to tie about Morfido's head one day when he cut his ear. She did not know how to make kites; she would not cut out pin-wheels; she wanted to teach them French,—altogether no sister was ever such a failure.

VIII.

AN AFTERNOON CALL.

SISTER CLEMENT was very fond of her old pupils. She often sighed to think that they should leave the shelter of her wings before they were better able to take care of themselves. They felt that they were ready for life the moment they received their graduating medal. But Sister Clement knew better than this. She had more fears for Marguerite than for Belinda. Marguerite's fashionable aunt, who visited her as frequently as possible, and whom Marguerite visited, had a bad influence on the young girl, and made her see life as one sees a stick in the water—crookedly.

Belinda was alone in the world, and she would be forced to earn her living among strangers. Still, Sister Clement thought of her with a peaceful feeling, while she was disturbed about Marguerite.

Marguerite's first callers at her home were the Misses Ross, very fashionable young girls, who drove up in a yellow dog-cart with jingling chains, and with their whip held at the proper angle.

Marguerite rushed down to see them at once, leaving her mother's cup of tea cooling on the table. She noticed with discontent that they had visiting cards of their own.

"Dear me!" said the elder Miss Ross, whose bang came down to her eyebrows, "I am so glad to see you! But we had such a time coming in! There were two horrid boys at the door with the beastliest dogs! Bertha and I almost fainted. Why don't you have them driven away?"

"They are my brothers," answered Marguerite, blushing.

"Poor dear! How you must suffer!" said Miss Ross, pressing her hand. "I know what boys are: To think that you and those creatures are of the same family,—it seems so queer!"

Marguerite felt a little resentful at this; but, as the Misses Ross were so stylish, she did not dare to show it. Besides, she was ashamed of her brothers.

"You have a croquet set on the lawn," said the second Miss Ross. "It is so old-fashioned! Everybody plays tennis now."

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"The boys like it," Marguerite said, again blushing for the croquet set; "and papa wants to please them."

"I hope you won't let your papa sacrifice you to those creatures, my dear," said the elder Miss Ross (she was just seventeen), tapping Marguerite on the cheek with a motherly air. "You need society."

"That's what my aunt, Mrs. Gillflory, of Chicago, says. I wish you would tell papa that."

"Is Mrs. Gillflory your aunt?" asked the elder Miss Ross. "Dear me! She is very well known. She goes into the best South Side society. You must come to see us soon, and present us to your aunt."

Marguerite eagerly promised. She did not know what to say next. She tried to think. In the few English novels she had read, people rang for tea at this hour in the afternoon.

"Let me give you some tea," she said.

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed the elder Miss Ross.

"Oh, how too sweetly nice!" added the other, sucking the handle of her parasol.

Marguerite touched the little bell on the table. After a moment Hannah appeared, followed by the boys and the two dogs.

- "What's wantin'?" asked Hannah.
- "Tea, of course," replied Marguerite, with an air of dignity.
- "Tea!" repeated Hannah, in a loud whisper.

 "And am I to leave my preserving to make tea for a lot of idle girls at this hour? I've just drawn a cup for your mother, which you've left cooling somewhere. It's no tea you'll get to-day, unless you make it yourself."

The Misses Ross looked at each other and giggled.

- "They're laughing at us!" remarked Aloysius from the doorway.
- "I don't like these girls, Hannah," said Fred.

 "May I make Morfido snap at 'em?"

The Misses Ross arose at this threat, and fled as quickly as they could.

- "I thought I'd make 'em run!" cried Fred, in high glee. "One of them tried to hit Prince with her whip as she came in."
- "Why do you have such queer friends?" Hannah asked, sternly. "The Ross lassies are just

whipper-snappers out of a fashionable New York school, with their heads full of nonsense. If it were for anybody else, I'd have made tea and given some of my cake with pleasure. But not for such silly things as they are."

Marguerite turned her back to Hannah, and Fred saw a tear fall on her hand. From the window she could see the Rosses driving off with their heads in the air.

"She is crying," said Fred, opening his eyes in wonder. "I never thought big girls cried."

Aloysius had a soft heart. He went up to Marguerite and put his arm around her.

"Never mind," he said; "we shall not do it again. And Hannah shall get you tea whenever you want it. Don't cry!"

Prince rubbed himself against Marguerite's dress: for he, too, hated tears. But Marguerite turned, and boxed her brother's ears, and—alas that I should write it!—kicked Prince. Henceforth war was declared.

IX.

THE NOTE.

HAVING heard much of the Ross girls, Mr. Laffan did not approve of them. They were very gay and fashionable, and much given to the reading of novels. So far Marguerite had not done much to improve things at home. She had complained about Hannah, about the china, about the old-fashioned furniture. And, after she had returned the visit of the Misses Ross, she became more ashamed than ever of her father's house. This was, indeed, a sad state of affairs.

"You must make the best of things, my dear," said her father. "I shall soon have to send the boys to college, and I must save up money for that. I hoped that you would help me."

"I didn't think you wanted me to be different from other people. The Rosses have a new Victoria and the loveliest rugs! I don't see why we shouldn't have them."

"The Rosses are rich," said Mr. Laffan; "and, besides, Marguerite, they like things of that sort. Your mother and I are more simple in our tastes. We are anxious that you should be comfortable, but not that you should be fashionable."

Marguerite pouted. After a moment's silence, she said:

"Really, papa, you are just as old-fashioned as the Sisters!"

"I wish you were a little more like them," her father answered with a sigh. "I am sure that your aunt's influence has spoiled you."

"I don't think so, papa. You ought to lead society here. And Aunt Gillflory thinks so too. If you don't do something in that way, Al and Fred will have no social position when they grow up. I can't do everything alone."

Her father laughed. "Nobody wants you to do anything, except to wait on your mother a little, make the boys and the dogs a little more civilized, and be a nice, kind girl to everybody."

"Aunt says-"

"Do not mind what your aunt says. She

thinks too much of fashion and worldliness. Do help me, my dear, and you shall have your reward."

The father and daughter were standing in the garden, near a bed of blazing red and yellow nasturtiums. Tears came to Marguerite's eyes. Something in his voice touched her. She stooped to pick a red nasturtium, and, standing on tiptoe, she put it into his buttonhole.

"Is it a bargain?" he asked, taking his daughter's hand.

"Yes, papa; it's a bargain," she answered, standing on tiptoe again to kiss him; for he was a tall man.

At that moment Aloysius and Prince came rushing up the path. Aloysius held two letters high in the air. They were both for Marguerite. As his father was present, Aloysius gave her the letters without any attempt at teasing. But when Prince brushed against her dress, she pulled away the skirt with an air of great disgust.

"We'll not bring your letters next time," muttered her brother. "Don't mind her, Prince!"

Marguerite tore open her first letter.

"It is from Belinda," she said. "She is not

well; she is in the city these hot days, and she has not found work yet."

"Let her come here to teach the boys," Mr. Laffan said, taking the letter from Marguerite. "I am glad she has the good sense to put her address at the top of the page. I'll telegraph to her as I go to the post-office."

Marguerite looked only half pleased. What would her fashionable friends, the Rosses, say to plain Belinda? She chased away the thought at once, and almost blushed for it, as her eyes met her father's serene glance. She opened the other note.

"Oh, I am so happy!" she exclaimed. "The Rosses ask me over to spend Thursday and Friday, and there's to be a dinner and a dance. Dear me! I wish I had some new dresses."

"If I telegraph, Belinda will come on Friday," observed Mr. Laffan.

"Another girl coming!" cried Aloysius. "O papa, don't have any more girls come here! They spoil all the fun. Prince," he whispered to the alert Scotch terrier, "we'll make her go home pretty quick, sha'n't we?"

Prince winked his one eye.

"Isn't it lovely!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And, O papa, will you hire Place's carriage to take me over? I am really ashamed of our old trap. And, O papa, I wish you would let me buy a wreath of wild roses I saw down at the shop the other day! They would be just the thing for my white evening dress."

Mr. Laffan turned away. Surely Marguerite must see that he wanted her to stay at home.

"Your mother is less well than usual," he remarked further.

"Oh, she will not miss me!" answered Marguerite. "I must go,—I can't refuse. Miss Ross will take no denial."

"What does she say?" asked Mr. Laffan, stretching out his hand for the note.

Marguerite blushed. She did not give it to him. "Why?" he asked, and a surprised look crossed his face.

"Oh, I don't care to show the note to you, papa! It is just some girlish nonsense,—nothing more."

"I did not think that you would have any secrets from me, Marguerite," he said, with a touch of displeasure in his voice.

"It is not a secret, papa: it is just nonsense, as I said," Marguerite replied, thrusting the paper into her pocket.

Mr. Laffan was silent. He felt that he understood girls so little that he did not care to make a mistake by insisting on seeing the note.

Marguerite dropped her head among the nasturtiums.

- "You are very young to go out," her father went on. "I think society can wait a while for you."
- "I have been graduated!" exclaimed the girl, raising her head suddenly.
- "Still, you are very young. And the Sisters did not intend to train you for society, but for home."
 - "Mrs. Gillflory-"
- "Please do not mention your aunt's name again, Marguerite."
- "I can't be penned up here like a prisoner!" she cried, bursting into tears.
- "Penned up here with your mother and father and brothers!"
- "And the dogs and the pigeons!" put in Aloysius, who had been listening.

"I must go out sometimes!" said Marguerite.

"And the Rosses, you must admit, are the most desirable acquaintances in the neighborhood."

"I wish that you would decline this invitation," her father said, going into the house.

Marguerite dried her eyes and held her head high. She was determined to have her way.

X.

THE WHEEL-CHAIR.

MARGUERITE'S father was worried. He had felt such pleasure when his "little girl" came from school that it had seemed to him as if he should never have to worry again. She would make her mother's life brighter, she would help to make the boys better, and take from him many of the burdens which were heavy upon him. But she had so far only made the burdens heavier. And this matter of the note seemed to him more serious than perhaps it was. But there was a secret kept from him, and it saddened this kind father to think that his daughter should have anything in her mind that she could not tell him. He did not care to mention the matter to her mother: he felt that she might feel as sad as himself. Probably if Marguerite had realized how she was troubling her father, she would have gone to him, and made him feel how little the Rosses were to her in comparison with him. Like many other daughters, Marguerite did not know how deeply her father loved her.

After her talk with him about the Ross visit, she went up to her room to think it over. She called to her mind Mrs. Gillflory's counsels and the different novels she had read in Chicago,—novels that gave brilliant pictures of life in England. Marguerite secretly admired the Rosses, because they seemed to be "so English." And so she wrote at once a note accepting the invitation, and signing herself "Peggy." Peggy was so English, it seemed to her; and she had always been ashamed of Marguerite,—a name which her mother loved very much.

Her conscience reproached her, but she stifled it. Her father had not actually forbidden her to go to the Rosses, and go she would. Still, she did not feel easy about it. And then, too, she felt that she was lacking in respect to her father; for Miss Ross had written, in a postscript to that note: "Papa would have asked your father to dinner, too; but, as you said yourself, he is so old-fashioned that he would feel out of place."

Marguerite's cheeks flamed as she read those

words. Of course they were not intended as an insult, but how could she show them to her father? She had said he was "old-fashioned"; but somehow the word took a different meaning when she read it in another's handwriting. She bitterly regretted her thoughtlessness and her folly; but now it was too late.

At any rate, she would go. It was her first chance of getting into society worthy of her. She brushed her hair carefully, and, locking up the note in her desk, went to her mother's room.

The invalid's face brightened. "I am so glad you have come, Marguerite!" her mother said, giving her a thin, transparent hand. "And I have good news for you."

Marguerite smiled. Perhaps her mother would announce a new dress for Thursday.

"My wheel-chair will be home on Thursday. It is on the softest springs, and your father says that now, for the first time in many years, I may go out into the air. And you, dear, shall wheel me around the garden. I can hardly wait. Think of being wheeled through the nasturtium walk by my own little girl! Why, Marguerite, it seems only yesterday that you were the sweetest little

baby; and here you are large and strong, and I am the helpless one." Mrs. Laffan pressed her daughter's hand and looked lovingly into her eyes. "We thought the doctor would never consent to my going out again. But I think the joy of your home-coming made me better, and the chair is to be ready on Thursday evening."

Marguerite was silent. "I am so sorry," she said, after a pause; "but I have an engagement on Thursday."

"I know, dear; I know," answered her mother, gaily. "Your great friend, Belinda, is coming. But the best of it is that you can wheel me—just think of it! me!—to the station to meet her. I shall join in your happiness."

Marguerite hesitated. Should she tear up her note accepting the Rosses' invitation? No: she would go,—she must go.

- "I meant, mother, that the Rosses have asked me for a two days' visit, including Thursday—"
- "Oh!" her mother said, with a note of disappointment in her voice. "I did not know it. Do you want to go?"
 - "Well, mother, you know---"
 - "But the Rosses are such fashionable people.

I hope you have something nice to wear. You know I have not been able to look after your wardrobe as I ought. Do you really want to go?"

"I don't see how I can refuse. My frocks are rather plain, but I suppose I shall have to make them do."

"Did you meet the Misses Ross at the school?" asked Mrs. Laffan.

"Oh, no!" said Marguerite, with a smile.
"They would never have stayed at the convent.
They went to Miss Blank's, on Fifth Avenue,—a lovely school indeed: opera boxes, promenades, bouquets from friends—everything. They are beautifully finished."

Mrs. Laffan smiled a little.

"Your father says that they can't speak decent English, and I hope you will not acquire their slang. Must you really go?" her mother asked, gently.

"I can't refuse," answered Marguerite, tightening her lips.

"I wish you could."

"Father did not tell me to do so."

"He knows best, my dear. But the Rosses are not the kind of people I want you to be inti-

mate with. They believe in nothing but money and fashion. Do try not to go."

"I must, mamma."

Mrs. Laffan sighed. Her wheel-chair was coming on Thursday, and there would be no daughter to enjoy it with her. Marguerite laid a bunch of heliotrope on the bed-quilt and went away. Mrs. Laffan cried softly to herself. This wheel-chair was, after her daughter's return, the event of her year. When the boys came in they saw the tears on her cheeks, and they said:

"It's that Marg! Mamma never cried before she came. Wait till the other girl comes, and we'll make it hot for her!"

Mr. Laffan saw traces of tears too. He did not ask the cause of them: he guessed it.

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XI.

SHE DEPARTS.

THURSDAY came. Marguerite had thought a great deal about the Rosses' party. Several times she had half resolved to refuse to go; but then she remembered Mrs. Gillflory, and the delight she would have in writing about her adventures in a long letter.

Mr. Laffan was grave and silent; he reproached himself for having let his daughter visit his gay and worldly sister, in spite of the gentle remonstrances of the nuns. To her visits he attributed all the frivolity of the young girl's action.

Marguerite knew she was doing wrong, and she sulked in her room during the days preceding the Rosses' entertainment. She looked over her stock of dresses, and spent most of her time before a looking-glass.

Mr. Laffan had a hard time explaining his daughter's absence from her mother's room. Mrs. Laffan fretted sadly, and seemed to grow worse.

"Marguerite is more fond of these strangers than she is of me," she said; "and I was so happy to have her at home!"

Fred saw the tears in her eyes, and he and Morfido went out to find consolation. After a while he returned, smiling, with a bunch of short-stemmed daisies, which he laid on the quilt.

His mother kissed him. "After all," she remarked, "it is nice to have a little boy at home."

Fred and Morfido were so pleased with this that they jumped into the bed and rolled over each other. It was uncomfortable for Mrs. Laffan; but she saw that they meant well.

Aloysius spent most of his time in devising tricks for the torture of the new girl who was coming on Thursday.

"We don't want another," he said to Prince.

"The house hasn't been the same since Marg came,—she wants us to call her Peggy. Oh, my!

I'll call her Piggy!" Prince raised his head and seemed to grin at this stroke of wit. "I've tied a string across the garden gate, and when she comes she'll fall flat. Then she'll see she isn't wanted, and go home. I did think of putting burrs in her bed, but I can't find the burrs; ground glass would do, but it might hurt her too much. I don't want to hurt her, Prince: I just want her to go away. Some people like girls; we don't. Because why? Hannah's cross, papa's solemn, mamma cries;—she makes us wash our faces, and she has tried to send you away."

Prince erected his ears and danced around Aloysius; it seemed plain that he did not want more girls in the house.

Mr. Laffan thought at one time that he would command Marguerite not to visit the Rosses, but his wife begged him not to do so.

"The Rosses are not bad people," she said; "they are only very fashionable. Take the matter gently. If Marguerite does not see for herself that she is wrong, force will not make her do so."

So Mr. Laffan was silent. He ordered the carriage for Marguerite, who hastily kissed her

mother with averted face, and was off, with all her best finery.

For the first few minutes of her drive she felt like turning back. How nice it would be to run up to her mother's room and to say with her arms around her mother's neck: "I will stay with you!" But pride, and the thought of what Aunt Gillflory would say, kept her back. A short time after this her spirits rose. She had her white muslin dress with the blue ribbons in her trunk, and her new lace fan. There would be much pleasure in displaying these things, and in showing the Rosses that she was not a humble country mouse, but a young woman who had gone into the best South Side society. She wondered whether she would wear her Irish point bertha the first evening or not. She finally decided that it would be too splendid; she would keep it for the dinner and the dance. Thus occupied, she forgot her regrets, and even began to take delight in the fresh air and beautiful green of the hedges she was passing, all crowded with birds' nests. She leant out the window to follow a rabbit with her eyes, and was delighted to see an immense mud-turtle creeping out of the wet ditch. Marguerite was very

much of a child, although she had been graduated; for, in spite of her aunt, Sister Clement had kept her as simple as possible.

The Rosses' house was painted brown and red. it was very large; little rooms and big porches and small paned windows were all mixed up with one another. The Rosses called it a Queen Anne cottage, and they had "Windermere" painted over the front gate.

Marguerite thought that this would give her a chance of talking about literature; for she remembered that Windermere was connected with Wordsworth. She began to make up brilliant conversations.

A servant, in a green coat with brass buttons, helped her out of the carriage. She was not sure whether it was proper to thank him or not, but she bowed her head after the manner of her aunt.

She found herself in a hall with a fireplace on one side and a bookcase on the other. Oh, she thought, if her father would only have a manservant in livery and a hall like that! The fireplace made her somewhat afraid of the Rosses. She had never seen a fireplace in a hall before.

She tried to think of her grandmother's Irish point bertha,—that, at least, would convince the Rosses that she was somebody, even if they had no fireplace in the hall at home.

XII.

THE GRAPE-ARBOR.

MARGUERITE found her reception a little cold. She expected to find the Misses Ross, with open arms, awaiting her. Instead of that she was shown to her room by a maid, who opened her trunk and laid her dresses out on the bed.

"How plain your things are!" said the maid.
"I think you had better send for some party dresses."

Marguerite blushed. She was afraid of this haughty maid. She felt like the little girl in *Punch* who said: "Mamma, will the waiter be angry with me if I don't eat all the soup?"

She tried to be brave, and she said:

"The white dress with the blue ribbons is my party dress."

"Dear me!" said the maid.

After she had gone, Marguerite sat in a low chair by the window and cried. She could see her own chimneys from the Rosses' house; she wished she were back home again. How she loved the very smoke coming out of those chimneys! And it was for this that she had allowed these people to slight her father. And Belinda was coming, too! If she were only back home she would never, never want to go into society again, no matter what Mrs. Gillflory said,—never!

After a while the maid came back with chicken salad and biscuits and tea on a waiter.

"You are not expected to go down until just before five o'clock. There'll be five o'clock tea in the grape-arbor," the maid said, as she put the waiter down on the table. "We're trying to live in the English fashion; since Miss Ross went abroad, the house has changed. I can't say I like it, but we all have to suffer for style."

Marguerite faced the chicken salad and the tea disconsolately. She disliked chicken salad. She had been accustomed to three solid meals at the convent, and a goutée, which made four. It was a little after twelve o'clock, and she thought sadly of the abundant dinner at home. The prospect of waiting until eight o'clock for dinner was not pleasant. Still, she felt that she, too, must suffer

for the sake of style. She ate a biscuit and drank the tea.

What was to be done, then? There were no books in the room. She saw a pretty desk, dainty and inlaid with brass; but the ink was dry in the stand, and there was no pen. What could she do? The smooth lawn, with a tennis court near it, was very tempting; but she dared not go down to it. At last she found a book in one of the closets. She opened it; it was a novel by Ouida. She had nothing to do; should she read it or not? Sister Clement had said, "No." But it was very tempting. She dipped into it, and found a highly colored description of a ball. No: she would not read it; she would keep her word to Sister Clement. She put the book back into the closet.

The house was very quiet. The birds in the trees seemed to have gone to sleep; the hush of the noon sunshine was over the whole landscape. What could she do? Before she knew it, she was fast asleep.

When she awoke the elder Miss Ross was in the room.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "it's time to dress!

"It's after five. Put on your best gown and come down to tea."

Marguerite rubbed her eyes, kissed Miss Ross on the cheek, and dressed as quickly as she could.

"Why, how plain you are!" said Miss Ross.
"You're dressed quite like a school-girl. This
dress I have on cost a hundred and fifty."

Miss Ross held her head high, and walked up and down the room, a mass of feathers and laces and fur.

- "I am only a school-girl," said Marguerite, timidly.
- "Well, Peggy, we'll soon make a belle of you. You're not half bad-looking," said Miss Ross.
- "I am afraid I shall never be made into a lady of society," said Marguerite.
- "Don't say 'lady,'" said Miss Ross: "that word's gone out of fashion. We're all women now."

Marguerite sighed and wished she were home. When she was ready she went down to the grape-arbor. There Miss Ross and her sister Molly were making tea by immersing little silver balls in tiny cups. There were ten or twelve young people there. Several of them were young men.

They were all introduced to Marguerite. And, later, Colonel Ross made his appearance. He was tall, erect, white-whiskered; he had been in the army. Marguerite liked his face. She could not keep up with the chatter of the young people, who talked and laughed, and paid little attention to her. She sat in a corner with a teacup in her hand. She hoped they would have some music; then she might take her own place, for she was sure that she could play well. It is not pleasant to feel as if one were "left out." She could not help thinking that if the Rosses had fashionable manners, they were not what the Sisters would have called good manners.

At last somebody spoke of music. One of the young men—he wore a blue and white tennis suit—suggested music. The color came to Marguerite's cheeks; now would come her chance.

"You play, I know," said Molly Ross to her; but though we have a piano that cost fifteen hundred dollars, we never use it. Nobody plays the piano now except professionals. When papa goes," she whispered, "you'll see some fun. We all play the banjo and mandolin."

After a few courteous words to Marguerite, the

Colonel drank his tea and went away. Then the young people began to laugh. Miss Ross seized the tennis cap of the young man, put it on one side of her head, and said, with an imitation of the manner of a street-boy:

"One of you blokes, gim me a cigarette!"

Everybody laughed. It was so very funny! A box of cigarettes was handed around, and each of the six girls lighted one.

"Excuse me," said Marguerite, frightened; "I must go!"

"Sit down, you little goose!" cried Miss Ross, pulling her skirt.

One of the young men threw the tennis cap on her head, and Molly Ross thrust a lighted cigarette between her lips. She stood up bewildered. At this moment she heard a familiar voice. She turned: her father, with a shocked and sad look on his face was gazing at her!

XIII.

MR. LAFFAN'S TALK.

MARGUERITE arose and stepped toward her father. She never forgot the look of pain in his face. She could not believe that anything she might do would make him look so. All at once it became known to her how much her father loved her. He had seemed so grave, so kind, so far above her. She did not attempt to take the tennis cap from her head; the cigarette dropped on the ground.

She met her father's look frankly and clearly. He must know that she could never be so unwomanly as she appeared to be. But he did not: he judged her by the character she had recently made for herself in his eyes. He bowed coldly to the group in the arbor. The young people composing it turned their backs and giggled.

"Your cousin Belinda has arrived," her father said; "and, as I had to pass Colonel Ross's, I

thought that I would tell you. She was enabled to come earlier than she expected."

"Oh, let her come over here,—do!" exclaimed the elder Miss Ross, who had thrown her cigarette away and rid herself of the giggle. "We'll be so charmed to have her!"

"I hardly think she would come," said Mr. Laffan, coldly. "She is unaccustomed to society. You would find her no doubt too dull and—too modest."

There was an awkward silence.

"I must apologize," Mr. Laffan went on, "for intruding. Colonel Ross led me to this arbor—but I see he has gone away. I am sure that if he knew of the rowdyism that was going on here, he would not have exposed us to this mortification."

Marguerite felt as if she could sink through the ground. One of the young men jumped up and said:

"The young ladies are in good company, sir."

"Possibly," returned Mr. Laffan. "But when I was young, I should not have considered myself worthy of the name of gentleman if I had

connived at such proceedings. Colonel Ross would be the last man to approve of this."

"It was only a 'lark,'" said the young man, growing very red.

"No doubt,—but not the kind of a 'lark' that nice people indulge in. I have never had greater pain in my life than my daughter has this minute given me. Let me tell you, young gentlemen, that you are responsible. This rough, uncouth fun, however blameless it may seem in your clubs, should not be carried into the society of young women. Slang and 'larks' like this have no place in their presence. You ought to protect them against such vulgar intrusions."

The young men held down their heads, and the Misses Ross looked at them reproachfully. Marguerite thought that her father had never seemed more noble. The young man who had first spoken advanced to give his hand to Mr. Laffan.

"You are right, sir," he said. "I am sure my father, if he were alive, would say the same thing. The girls are not to blame, And we didn't think. You have given me a lesson, sir, that I shall not forget."

Mr. Laffan shook hands with him. He glanced about at the group, which looked rather crestfallen. Then he smiled.

"My dear young friends," he said, "let us talk a little." He put his driving whip against the wall, and sat down on one of the rustic benches. "I have a theory that if we could really cultivate the art of conversation, we shouldn't be so dependent on billiards and cards and—'larks.'"

Miss Ross looked up at Mr. Laffan's face. It was smiling, but grave. All the defiance in her mind melted away. She was interested.

"But we couldn't talk all the time," she remarked, thoughtfully.

"That wouldn't be desirable," replied Mr. Laffan; "but we can, when we do talk, try to have something to say,—something interesting and instructive."

"Oh, that sort of talk is a bore!" said the elder Miss Ross.

"What kind of talk is not a bore, in your opinion?" asked Mr. Laffan.

"I like to talk about the fashions and about people and about parties, and things like that."

"But don't you get tired of that? I fancy that

your father does not enjoy it. There he is, off alone, smoking his pipe among the roses. I am sure he would be immensely pleased if one of his daughters should go over and talk to him about something that interests him,—his roses, for instance."

"But we don't know anything about roses," said the second Miss Ross.

"Why shouldn't you learn, to please him? It would be worth the trouble, wouldn't it?"

"Papa doesn't care," observed the elder Miss Ross. "He prefers to be alone."

"Ah, no! Fathers sometimes seem to like to be alone, but they love to have their children with them. There is no greater pleasure in life than being with one's children. But, of course, your father does not care for the fashions."

"I should think not!" said Miss Ross. "But what does he care to talk about? When I ask him for money he is not always pleased."

There was a giggle here. Marguerite sat in a corner, neglected. Her father seemed to think more of these young people than of her, and they were so greatly interested in him they cared for nobody else. She admired her father, and yet

she was jealous of him, of the others,—utterly dissatisfied and ashamed.

He went on talking and telling stories, and the young people said he was more interesting than a book. They begged him to stay to dinner. But he went away, making Marguerite promise to be home the next evening.

"I have given her a lesson," he said, as he drove home. "I hope I have not been too lenient. If her mother were only well! How useless a father is, in regard to his daughter, when her mother cannot help him!"

XIV.

IN THE ARBOR.

WHEN Marguerite's father had gone, the members of the group dispersed to dress for dinner. Marguerite was ashamed to own that she had on her best frock, and that there was no need for her to go upstairs again. She remained in the grape-vine arbor until Miss Ross came down, a mass of blue streamers.

"We found your father quite interesting," said Miss Ross; "I wish he could have stayed. Really, I wish my father would talk on more reasonable subjects! He seems to think girls are such fools, and he even says so. I must say that when your father talked, I felt much less like a fool than usual."

Marguerite's eyes sparkled; she was glad to hear her father praised by the elegant Miss Ross. It had never occurred to her that he was specially interesting.

"Papa will regret his hard-hearted conduct,"

Miss Ross went on; "for I am seriously thinking of being engaged."

Marguerite opened her eyes in utter amazement.

"Yes, I feel that I am not appreciated here. At school—Miss Blank's you know—we were allowed to see some young men occasionally. And there was one in particular who was especially attentive to me. He used to send me baskets of oranges, with a note in each orange. I was too young then," said Miss Ross, with a sigh, "to engage myself; so, of course, I forgot all about him. Now, which of the young men you met here do you like?"

"I didn't notice them much. They seemed a little—a little—boisterous."

"Oh, that's their way! They learn that at college. I thought I'd ask your opinion. Nearly all the girls in our set have been engaged four or five times. But I have always been rather backward, and papa is so queer. So I thought I'd make a beginning; but I don't know which to choose."

Marguerite's good sense, which had only been hidden for a while by Mrs. Gillflory's foolishness, began to assert itself.

"I can't advise you," she answered, somewhat startled. "I think you are too young to think of such things."

"Just like a convent girl!" said Miss Ross.
"I might have known you would not sympathize with me. "But," she added, earnestly, "keep my secret."

"What secret?" asked Marguerite.

"About my engagement."

Marguerite laughed. Somehow or other, the gilt was rubbing off the elegant Miss Ross very fast.

"There cannot be any secret since you have not made your choice," Marguerite said. "Forgive me for laughing."

"You had no business to laugh," replied Miss Ross, in an offended tone. "I don't see anything funny about being engaged. It is a serious matter."

"The Sisters always said so," observed Marguerite. "With us, you know, matrimony is a Sacrament; and therefore an engagement is a very serious thing."

"I thought convent girls never thought of marriage at all,—I thought the Sisters would

almost kill them if they flirted just a little bit. Now, Miss Blank didn't mind. She always said that a box of Huyler's and a little flirtation every week kept girls in a good humor."

Marguerite was silent. Suddenly she understood the depths that separated her from Miss Ross. Fashion was very well on the surface, but better plain Belinda and the old carpets at home than this sort of thing.

"I don't understand how you can talk so," she went on, after a pause. "Sister Clement talked a great deal about marriage as a vocation and a Sacrament—"

"Oh, you'd take all the fun out of life! I think it is the jolliest thing to be engaged—without papa knowing anything about it. I like some things in the Catholic Church—Miss Blank used to take us to the cathedral sometimes,—but I wouldn't be a Catholic; for, with your ideas of marriage, there couldn't be any divorce."

Marguerite looked shocked. She wished she were at home; she felt as if the air were bad here.

"Oh, here comes Casper!" said Miss Ross; "don't tell him. He's my brother. You haven't

met him yet. He sleeps nearly all day, and is up all night."

A thin, tall boy of about fifteen years of age came from the house. He wore no hat; he had on a black jacket, a low-cut waistcoat, wide black trousers with a very plain crease down the front, a white necktie, a large rose in his buttonhole and a cigarette between his lips.

"Miss Laffan, my brother Casper."

"Glad to see you, Miss Laffan. Are you one of Miss Blank's girls? House is full of them."

"No: I'm one of Sister Clement's girls."

"Oh!" said Casper, lounging into a chair and preparing to patronize Marguerite. "Yes, I remember. You're the girl with the Irish-French name, aren't you? Queer!"

"And you're the boy with the German-English name," said Marguerite. "Oh, yes! I remember. Dear me! You are taller than I supposed. But young boys shouldn't stay up so late. Your sister says that they put you to bed very late."

Miss Ross giggled. Casper looked angrily at Marguerite, and puffed at his cigarette.

"I suppose the girls are trying to get you into society," he said. "The Rosses are Scotch, not

English. And if I have a German name, what's that to you?"

"Don't make remarks on other people's names," said Marguerite, her eyes sparkling. "You ought not to smoke, child: cigarettes will make you all yellow. Miss Ross, may I give your brother some gumdrops? I have a few in my pocket,—but do you let him eat them before meals?"

Casper jumped from his chair in a rage.

A tall form darkened the grapevine arbor. It was Colonel Ross.

"Permit me, Marguerite," he said, "to take you to dinner. I have accidentally overheard the lessons you have given to both my children. Casper, you are a conceited young ape, trying to be a full-grown monkey!"

. XV.

BELINDA.

BELINDA felt very lonely as she stepped out of the car at the station. She was an orphan, and she had been visiting some distant cousins. It was not easy to get music pupils in the summer, and her relatives had been rather cool to her,—partly because they were entirely interested in their own affairs, and partly because they did not want to encourage her to believe that she could live with them. They were rich enough, but riches do not always make people soft-hearted.

The Sisters did not forget Belinda: somehow, with all their duties, they found time to write to her. Without those letters she would have felt as if she were almost deserted in a great world. She liked Marguerite very much; and she imagined, as she went along, how happy Marguerite would be to see her. She was not aware that she

had come a day too soon, or that Marguerite preferred new friends to an old one; nor was she aware that "the rulers of the house" had determined that all girls should be persecuted to the bitter end. If she had known these things, poor Belinda would probably have gone back and waited patiently at her cousins' until she had found something to do. She had tried to read a little French book, "Les Roses de Noël," on her way; but her attention had wandered to other things, and she had betaken herself to her rosary, and then to her hopes and fears.

Once at the station, she looked around for Marguerite, but in vain. She saw a colored man with a wheelbarrow, a boy with newspapers, a dilapidated carriage, whose driver called out: "Turnbull Hotel! Turnbull Hotel!"

Two boys passed her, followed by two dogs. One boy was bigger than the other. The first dog had one eye, a stumpy tail, and curly brown hair; the second looked like a sausage on four sticks. The boys were Aloysius and Fred; the dogs, of course, Prince and Morfido.

Belinda spoke to the smaller boy.

"Where does Mr. Laffan live, please?"

Fred looked up at her, and Morfido snapped at her dress. Aloysius nudged him.

- "That's her!" he said.
- "Mr. Laffan?" asked the smaller boy, with an air of stupidity. "Did you mean Mr. R. J. Laffan?"
 - "Yes," said Belinda.
- "We don't know him. Maybe you mean Mr. George Washington Laffan," interposed Aloysius.
- "Perhaps so—I am not quite sure," replied Belinda.
- "There isn't any such person," said Aloysius.
 "I guess you'd better go home again."

Poor Belinda's heart sank. Could she have mistaken the place?

The driver of the carriage—he had no passengers—came up at this moment.

- "Where do you want to go, Miss?" he asked, in his kindest tones.
 - "To Mr. Laffan's."
- "All right," said the man. "I'll run over to the store for some squashes—you just hold the reins for a moment,—and I'll drive you to his door for fifteen cents. I'll not be gone long."

Belinda stepped into the carriage, greatly

relieved. The horses stood still very willingly. They were starved, sandy-colored animals, ungroomed and mud-spotted.

"Don't you go with him," said Aloysius, going close to Belinda. "Those horses were bought from a circus. They will dash you against the foaming rocks and the dismantled gorges ere you have wended a mile," he added, in a hoarse voice.

Belinda looked at the boy in amazement, but said nothing.

"You may meet wolves or bears," added Fred; or robbers. This used to be a wild country. You'd better go home. And Mr. Laffan has two boys. They're awful!"

"Hush up!" said Aloysius, rudely. "The boys are all right; but they have the most fe-ro-ci-ous dogs—and a sister! Perhaps you've come to visit the sister. Well, she isn't at home. Perhaps you'd better take the next train back. The station is very comfortable to wait in."

Belinda looked at the upturned faces of the boys and at the dogs, and laughed.

"I like boys and dogs and even wolves—when they're nice," she said.

"You'd better not go. Pete Raikes' horses these are Pete Raikes' horses—often run away."

"I don't mind," said Belinda, taking the reins. She looked at the boys again. They had a resemblance to Marguerite. These must be her brothers and the dogs. "I am not afraid of wolves," she continued, mischievously; but I dislike bad boys, and I have heard that Marguerite Laffan's brothers are the worst boys in the neighborhood. People say so."

"Who says so?" demanded Aloysius. "Who says so—I'd like to know?"

"Do you know them? If I thought you knew them, I should be afraid to speak to you. I do hope they are not so wicked as they are painted, —I do hope so, for poor Marguerite's sake."

Aloysius and Fred looked at each other.

"And their dogs!" Belinda went on. "The people say the dogs are horrible beasts."

"It's not true," answered Fred. "You can ask Hannah."

"The Laffan boys are as good as anybody about here," said Aloysius. "Nobody can say a word against them. They're awfully nice. You just see them once, and you'll find out."

"I should be afraid," said Belinda.

Pete Raikes came up with his squashes, took the reins, and the carriage drove off. Belinda laughed, and it did her good.

- "Those are the Laffan boys," said Pete.
- "I know it," replied Belinda, still laughing.
- "We'll fix her!" said Aloysius.
- "We'll fix her!" repeated Fred. "Just let her wait. She'll not stay long, and spoil all our fun."

They stood for some time, watching the road, and making a plan.

XVI.

THE GHOST.

BELINDA'S meeting with the boys put her in good humor. And when she, her bag and trunk, came near Mr. Laffan's house, she was ready to be pleased with anything.

"How pretty!" she said, as the carriage stopped in front of the gate. "Why, the house is almost buried in green!"

"I can't call it pretty exactly," replied Pete.
"I like more paint, and less weeds and truck,—
but I suppose some people like snaky vines and
such like."

Belinda was surprised not to find Marguerite at the gate. She descended, paid Pete, who demanded ten cents extra for carrying in her trunk, and raised the brass knocker timidly. Hannah came to the door. Belinda began to feel depressed again. Perhaps she was not welcome; perhaps the family had moved; perhaps Marguerite was ill.

Hannah, a picture of primness in her pretty white cap and apron, held the door half open.

"Weel, lassie," she said, "what do you want? Margie's na at home."

And then, looking at Belinda's appealing eyes and simple dress, and catching sight of the trunk, her Scotch sense of hospitality came to the rescue.

"Come in," she said; "come in. I was na aware that you were the lassie we are expecting. I supposed you were mair set up like with yourself. You're just as plain as anybody else. Are you the graduate?"

"Yes—from the convent," Belinda said, encouraged by the softening of the lines in Hannah's face.

"Weel, weel! I am surprised. I thought you'd be mair like the stuck-up Miss Rosses. And you're not that way at all!" And Hannah felt the texture of Belinda's simple gown, as she removed her hat. "It could na have cost more than a levy a yard," she murmured with satisfaction. "She's a wee, canny body,—and poor, no doubt. I've no use for the rich; for we've always been poor ourselves."

She observed that Belinda's gloves fitted her

nicely, and from that concluded that she was "quite a leddy."

"Margie's away. And we're not wearying after her," said Hannah, decidedly. "You can run right up to Mrs. Laffan's room and tidy up; she'll be glad to see you. And I'll send up a cup of tea in a minute or two. You've nice, red cheeks, dear, and a quiet way I like. You must have Scotch bluid in you."

Belinda smiled. "No: I am sure not."

"What a pity! what a pity!" answered Hannah. "Not but what there is decent folk amongst other people."

"I don't know," said Belinda; "and I am afraid I don't care much. We must be friends at any rate."

"Oh, sure!" said Hannah. "But I have so much to do in this house, where the mother's an invalid, that it's little time I have for friendliness."

"But I can help you," said Belinda, with a pleasant look.

"Ah!" answered Hannah, "in my experience, girls pottering about a kitchen are worse than boys."

Belinda's countenance fell. "I fancy you think I am useless because I have come out of a school, —because I am a graduate, don't you? Why, the Sisters made us learn to cook and to do all manner of useful things."

Hannah sniffed. "Margie don't show much of that training."

"That is not the Sisters' fault. A girl comes out of school, and if she wants to be lazy and her people spoil her, all the blame is laid on the Sisters—I don't mean to blame Marguerite at all," observed Belinda, remembering what she was saying. "Marguerite can do many useful things, if she tries."

"I hope so," said Hannah; "but she seems to me very like a fule."

Belinda followed Hannah upstairs. Mrs. Laffan lay, white and tired-looking, with her face to the wall, and her thin hands holding a rosary on the quilt.

"She's wearying for Margie," whispered Hannah.

Belinda approached the bed. Mrs. Laffan opened her eyes; and, after one look at her sweet, patient face, Belinda knelt beside her and kissed

one of the thin hands. Mrs. Laffan smiled and smoothed her soft brown hair.

"So this is Belinda?" she said; and they became friends at once.

Belinda spent a happy day. There was so much to be done, so many little touches that might make Mrs. Laffan happier—flowers to be arranged, and the room to be made so much more comfortable. When Mr. Laffan came home, he was surprised to see his wife looking better than usual. And then he went over to tell Marguerite that Belinda had arrived.

When it became dark, Belinda went into the heliotrope-scented garden for a walk. She hummed to herself, because she felt happy. But suddenly her heart stood still, and she could scarcely suppress a scream. Before her, arising out of a clump of low cedar bushes, was a horrible figure. It was clothed in white, with fiery eyes, and a head that waved to and fro with a horrible grin. It waved its arms toward her, shrieking wildly.

XVII.

MORFIDO'S ACCIDENT.

BELINDA was frightened. She had never seen anything so terrible as this appearance. It seemed ten or twelve feet high. Its eyes glowed with fire. Its head trembled and shook and threatened her. Its white garment reflected the fire that shone from its horrible mouth.

Belinda had strong nerves. She had not spoiled them by late hours, overeating of candy, or sensational novels which fill the mind with strange terrors. After the first shock, she stood her ground. It occurred to her that it would be quite as unsafe to run away from this creature as to face it.

"Has she swooned?" whispered somebody.
"I can't see,—shall I run?"

"Keep quiet," growled another voice; "she is not moving at all. Groan, groan!"

A noise, which would have sounded fearful to

Belinda if she had not listened to the dialogue, was now heard. She looked at the swaying head of the figure again, and she laughed. She had seen something like it before. She determined to carry the war into the enemy's country. She rushed at it, shrieking in the most unladylike but effective manner. The figure wavered, tottered, fell; and Belinda saw the hollow rind of a large mock-orange, a sheet, a clothes prop, and a sputtering candle on the ground before her. The boy that had held the prop was Fred. He had crawled into the shrubbery. Howls came from Morfido, on whom the prop had fallen, and who had become entangled in the sheet which had been the white garment of the apparition. Belinda saw Aloysius hiding behind the big elm; but she took no notice of him. She picked up the candle. Morfido, caught in the sheet, yelped and wriggled.

"Dear me!" Belinda said aloud, laughing a little to herself. "How I pity poor Marguerite! How she must have suffered living in the same house with those two awful boys!"

Aloysius shook his fist at her in the safe darkness. She stuck the candle into one of the eyes of the mock-orange gourd, and picked up Morfido. Morfido looked up at her with his bead-like, Japanese eyes, and tried to wriggle out of her hands. But she held him tight. One of his paws had been hit by the sharp edge of the pole. It was cut and bleeding.

"Let that dog alone," called out a voice behind her. It was Fred's. "Let it go,—it's my dog." Belinda coolly examined Morfido's paw.

"Even if you said 'please,' like a gentleman, I should not let this dog go,' she said. "Don't you see he is hurt? But, of course, a boy who frightens his sister's friends when they come to visit his father's house does not care whether a poor dog has been hurt or not."

Morfido, who saw, out of his keen eyes, that he was the subject of conversation, gave a sad yelp.

"I do care," said Fred.

"Then please go and get some water."

Fred ran off, returning almost at once with a battered tin cup full of clear water. Belinda thanked him, and, bending her head close to the light, carefully wiped with her handkerchief the grains of gravel from the little dog's wound. Then she drew from her purse, while Fred held

Morfido, a piece of sticking-plaster, and covered the cut with it.

"There, he'll do now!" said Belinda, rising.
"You may take your candle."

Morfido, restored to liberty, jumped up and down joyfully, and tried to lick Belinda's hand. And as she moved away, he followed her. Fred called to him. He slowly turned and went to his master.

Aloysius now came from behind the elm.

"Oh, she'll tell papa!" he said. "Girls always tell."

"I'll run and ask her not to," said Fred.

"No, don't; because then she'll tell Marg, and Marg will tell papa all the same. I felt a little mean when she wouldn't run. I don't like that girl. She's come to stay," he added, with a sigh.

"She's better than Marg. She seemed sorry for Morfido."

Aloysius shook his head. "She's sly,—some girls are slyer than others, and she is one of the slyer ones. Most girls would have swounded or gone into fits. She's too sly for that. She's been frightening other people with mock-oranges, or else she would have screeched and gone on awful.

But they always tell. Papa will make it hot for us."

Fred looked at Morfido, and took courage. "I rather like her," he answered, "and so does Morfido."

"You'll find out," said Aloysius. "You and Morfido are younger than Prince and I.* She's sly; she'll be nice to us and the dogs, and make faces at us and say things when we are not looking. I've seen Marg smooth Prince, and then, after I'd gone down for the letters for her, just give him a kick and call him a nasty beast."

Fred was silent. "I wonder if she can tell stories," he said.

"Oh, yes!" answered Aloysius. "When she wants you to run errands, she'll promise to tell you Cinderella and such stuff, and about bad little boys,—that is, if she has time; but she'll never have time. We must make her go back where she came from. Think, Fred, of *two* girls in the house!"

[&]quot;It would spoil our fun," said Fred.

[&]quot;It would be always talk like this: 'Look at

^{*} Aloysius—one must be truthful—really said "me and Prince."

the spots on that boy's jacket,—idiot!' 'Do keep your shoes clean, stupid!' 'Sit up straight!' 'Papa, Al's put his spoon half-way down his throat!' 'Do keep those filthy dogs out of the house!' I'm sick of that. If the girls stay, I'll run away to be a pirate,—I will!"

XVIII.

UNDER THE LAMP.

THE sitting-room at Mr. Laffan's house had been generally dark in the evening. Marguerite preferred the parlor—or drawing-room, as she liked to call it. Hannah sat in the kitchen; the boys and the dogs stayed with her, and Mr. Laffan went up to his study. Belinda had been taught to do the duty which lay nearest to her; and she saw, after she had a short talk with Mr. Laffan, that he wanted her to help the boys in every possible way, besides inducing them to learn something about music.

Mr. Laffan was pleased with Belinda, and his wife's praises of her helped to increase this pleasure. She seemed so honest, so straightforward and unpretentious, that it was like breathing pure country air after imprisonment in an atmosphere tainted with musk to be near her.

Belinda looked into the parlor, which Marguerite had "fixed up" with tidies and "fancy work" of all sorts. It did not look comfortable. She asked Hannah if she might light the big lamp on the sitting-room table; and Hannah, of course, assented, wishing that the boys and dogs would go there for a while, and stay out of her kitchen.

The sitting-room was home-like. Belinda was pleased with the big lamp and the great table, with the clump of geraniums in the bay window, and even with the faded carpet; for Belinda had no love for new things. Over the square piano, which was not new, hung a violin and a shelf full of books. There could be no lack of occupation, she thought, even if it should rain for a week.

The boys were surprised to see a light in the sitting-room. They stood outside on the veranda and watched her. Belinda very soon became aware of this. She took a sheet of drawing-paper from her portfolio, and began to sketch.

- "What is she making?" whispered Fred.
- "I don't care!" answered Aloysius.

Belinda held the paper up behind the light.

- "It looks like a dog."
- "Girls don't draw dogs," said Aloysius; "they draw only flowers and things."

"I'll go and see," said Fred.

Aloysius was silent. He was as curious as Fred, but he did not care to admit it. Fred pushed open the screen of wire netting that swung before the window, and entered the room, followed by Morfido.

Belinda took no notice of them until Fred had reached her elbow.

"See—she has drawn Morfido's head! Oh, come in, Al!"

Aloysius pretended not to hear; but he watched eagerly through the screen, while Belinda went on with her work.

"Oh, me! oh, my!" Fred said. "Do come in! It's just like Morfido,—just like him! She might do Prince, too. Come in, Al!"

Aloysius walked slowly into the room. Belinda held up the sketch of Morfido's head. It was not very cleverly done, but it was like Morfido.

"It's well enough," said Aloysius, wishing that she would draw Prince's head.

"Will you give me that picture when it's done?" asked Fred, eagerly. "I want to show it to Hannah and all the boys in the town. It's fine!"

Morfido jumped into Belinda's lap; she laughed, and showed him his picture. Morfido growled and wagged his tail.

"He thinks it's another dog!" cried Fred.
"Oh, my! oh, me! he's going to fight it!"

Belinda withdrew the picture, and Morfido ceased to be angry.

"Make me a horse," said Fred, edging up to the table. "I can draw houses, but not horses; but Al can make funny pigs, only their hind legs are always wrong."

"Do you like to draw?" asked Belinda.

"I don't know how," answered Aloysius, frowning; "and I shouldn't want to learn, if I couldn't do better than that."

He did not mean this at all, but he thought it was a manly thing to say.

"You can't do better than that," said Fred, while Belinda cheeks colored a little; for rudeness always hurts. "You know you can't. Just you try to draw Prince's head yourself."

Aloysius said nothing; Belinda drew a piece of foolscap paper from her portfolio, and gave Aloysius a pencil.

"Try," she said.

"I can't draw well at night, you know," he answered, sulkily.

Fred laughed. Aloysius kicked him under the table. He and Morfido howled in concert, and Belinda took the small boy in her arms and said:

- "Never mind! Perhaps you'd like to hear a story?"
- "About races—horse-races?" asked Fred, ceasing to howl.
- "Yes, yes," said Belinda, and Fred fixed his eyes on her, waiting for her to begin. Aloysius went into a dark corner with Prince, and pretended not to listen.

XIX.

THE EVENING.

BELINDA had her hands full. Fred demanded story after story, but the stories must be about races.

"When I get big," said Fred, running up and down the room, "I am going to be a jockey. Tell me another story. Marg used to promise, but it was always Cinderella or about the bad little boy that disobeyed his sister. The Commandments don't say anything about obeying sisters, do they?"

"I think not,—I am sure not," said Belinda.

"But boys ought to be nice to their sisters, anyway."

Fred looked doubtful.

"You don't know Marg," he said, after a moment. "If God had intended to put something about obeying sisters in the Commandments, I'm sure He wouldn't have meant sisters like Marg.

If she told you to run down to the post-office seven times a day in the hot sun, I guess you wouldn't like it. And then scold, scold,—all the time scold!"

"Girls think boys have no rights," growled Aloysius from the corner.

Belinda did not answer at once. Aloysius watched her, his lips unclosed, ready for a verbal fight.

"I don't--"

"You're another!" cried Aloysius rapidly, anxious to get in the first blow. This was his method of battle with Marguerite.

"She didn't say anything," said Fred. "You began first!"

"That's right—take her part!" replied Aloysius. "And when you want shoemaker's wax again, just go to her for it. She doesn't keep shoemaker's wax in her pocket, I'll warrant that!" he added, with a whistle of derision.

"I was going to say," Belinda continued, recovering from her astonishment, "that I think boys have rights."

"Oh, yes,—you do!" said Aloysius, contemptuously. "I've heard that said before: when a girl wants a boy to go errands for her! Oh, yes!"

Belinda made no reply to this; she went on
with her story:

- "Jasper was an orphan and poor-"
- "Where did he live,—where did he live?" demanded Fred. "Had he a house?"
 - "He lived in Cleveland. He-"
- "Where is Cleveland?" asked Fred. "Is it a nice place? Do they have 'lectric lights there?"
- "Cleveland's in Ohio, don't you know? Stupid!" said Aloysius.
- "Jasper," Belinda went on, "had nothing to eat."
- "Nothing?" said Fred. "Not even oatmeal nor potatoes?"
 - "Nothing," said Belinda, solemnly.

Fred was interested.

"I should think he could have gone in and taken some watermelons out of somebody's patch. It wouldn't be any harm, if you were starving," said Fred. "When I looked at old Curdgeon's green and black beauties last year, I often wished I could take half a dozen without committing a sin,—and I'd like to be starving just for an hour or so. Curdgeon's so mean!"

"So's Joe Curdgeon!" put in Aloysius. "He wouldn't lend me his accordion, though I gave him a baseball bat when he was to play the Crocertown nine. The Curdgeons are all mean. Why, Joe will eat a whole pie out at his kitchen door sometimes without asking you to have even a bite. He's always taking 'loners,'—I, hate boys that take 'loners.' People ought to share. Marg used to eat all the chocolates out of the box of candy, and leave the hard gumdrops for us. Of course I don't care for candy, but Fred does."

"Jasper's uncle had a horse,—an old horse, that was badly fed," said Belinda, resuming the story.

"And——"

"Did he win the race?—that's what I want to know," said Fred. "And, if his jockey's colors were not green, you needn't go on with the story."

Aloysius laughed.

"Yes, he won the race," said Belinda.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Aloysius. "That's just like a girl! An old horse win a race! Oh, dear! I suppose it was Nellie Bly,—you'll say that next."

"Who is Nellie Bly? I don't know her," said Belinda, bewildered.

Fred and Morfido rolled on the floor, and Aloysius bent himself double.

"Oh my, oh me!" cried Fred. "She thinks Nellie Bly is a girl!"

Belinda's bewilderment only made the boys laugh more. But instead of getting angry, as the boys expected her to do, she laughed herself. Indeed the spectacle of Prince's eyes, seeming to twinkle with mirth too, and of Morfido's bounds, were too much for her.

"Nellie Bly is the greatest racer in America," said Aloysius. "She broke the record."

"Oh!" said Belinda, still bewildered.

Aloysius came out of his corner to explain all about Nellie Bly's famous run. Belinda listened meekly to a lengthy discourse which seemed to consist chiefly in "Sally G., don't you see?" "An' Nellie Bly, don't you know?"

Belinda felt it her duty to show interest.

"What a queer name!" she remarked. "Why doesn't the young lady, Sally G:, write her name out in full?"

At first the boys received this astounding

speech in silence; then they rolled over and over each other and the dogs, roaring with laughter. How could such ignorance exist? Not to know the names of the greatest horses in the world! Belinda's deplorable lack of knowledge touched them. They were only little men, after all; and Belinda had gained their regard by showing that she knew less than they did. Marguerite's affectation of superior knowledge had been against her; the boys could have stood an occasional cuff or slap, but they could not endure her superior knowledge of all subjects. And, then, Belinda was so good-natured about it. Instead of scolding, she laughed with them. To make a diversion, she went to the piano and began to play "Hiawatha March."

"Oh, that's jolly!" said Aloysius. "Do you know 'Sweet Rosy O'Grady?"

Belinda began to play that delightful air.

"Marg would never play that," said Fred.
"It was always choppin' and choppin'—whatever that is,—whole books full that never stop."

Belinda wheeled around on the stool, cutting short the boys' "She's my jo——" and leaving them with mouths open.

"If you say another word against Marguerite, I won't play!"

"Go on," said Aloysius; "we won't. That's right—stick up for your friend. Now, Marg—but go on. 'Sweet Rosy O'Grady!'" he bawled, and Fred and Prince and Morfido joined in.

At this moment Mr. Laffan looked in at the group about the piano. Mrs. Laffan had just sent Hannah to him to say that she liked to hear the noise,—it was a sign the boys were enjoying themselves.

He smiled and passed on.

"Belinda has patience and sympathy. It will come right, after all," he said, as he went back to his study.

XX.

THE GRAVE.

MARGUERITE drove home from the Rosses' house in a discontented state of mind. She felt that she had seen fashion in all its glory. The Ross idea of style entirely surpassed Mrs. Gillflory's ideas. There had been tea at five o'clock, and a late dinner with flowers and a butler, and tennis, and a great deal of talk about society. It had all made Marguerite feel very small. She was not sure whether a woman should sit immediately behind the coachman when she went out in her victoria or on the left side. She did not even know that a victoria was a carriage called after the Queen of England, and yet this had occupied much of the conversation. She had lived among people who, according to Mrs. Gillflory, her aunt, ought to be her models. She had found them different from what she expected. As the horse jogged along, she did not notice the greens of the trees that arose in clumps on either side of her,—those greens which we call green, because we do not take the trouble to find out how many tints go to make the whole color.

Marguerite was buried in her thoughts. had forgotten her prayers for two mornings, so anxious had she been to get downstairs; she had omitted reading in her little book of meditations -a gift from Sister Clement, -and she felt as if she had been living in a foreign world. She was tired, from the effort of trying to keep up with the talk of the young people about her. She was pleased with one thing: all the Rosses had begged her "to make" her father visit the Colonel often. After all, even among fashionable people something counted besides mere fashion. Colonel Ross had been very kind; he would not let her go until after luncheon, and he had said to her: "Come again, my dear. I think my daughters could profit by your example."

Marguerite had blushed at those words. How little she deserved them! To think that his daughters were to have been her models! After all, she thought, the Sisters might be right: there

was another side of the fashionable world. But, then, of course, the Sisters did not know so much about that world as Mrs. Gillflory. Marguerite compared Sister Clement and her aunt. There was no doubt that Sister Clement was the nicer, the more clever, the more interesting. She could imagine the Rosses and their guests laughing at Mrs. Gillflory's talk about rich dresses and fine furniture; and she suppressed a giggle herself as she thought how many times she had heard her aunt say to strangers: "My bath-room cost a thousand dollars; it is floored with the most expensive acoustic tiles!" But these Rosses would not dare to laugh at Sister Clement. Then she grew a little angry, and asked herself why she should care for the opinion of the Rosses.

The fresh breeze blew in her face, and brought the scent of roses to her. They were turning the hedges to a soft pink with their timid beauty. She knew she was nearing home by that scent; for the wildrose hedge began near home. She saw the walls of her father's house among the trees. She felt that she was actually glad to get home. In fact, the thought of "those horrid boys" did not entirely spoil her pleasure. After all, Fred was a dear little fellow at times. And she would not wish Aloysius to be like those young men at the Rosses for anything. She shuddered at the thought. Yes, Mrs. Gillflory must be wrong,—society had its shadows. Aloysius was rough and impudent, but he was not affected and spoiled beyond redemption. She began to pity herself. If they would only love her at home! If the boys would only learn her true value! The tears almost came to her eyes as she thought of how good she was and how little the people at home appreciated her. She wished that her father could have heard Colonel Ross' last words.

The carriage stopped in front of the gate. She descended, with the sigh of a martyr. As she opened the gate, her feelings suddenly changed at sight of a group on the lawn. Her mother sat in the wheelchair, while Belinda held her hand; and the boys, singing aloud their favorite song, pushed the chair as gently as they could. Mrs. Laffan was looking up at Belinda, and thanking her for the bunch of wild roses she held.

Marguerite frowned slightly. Jealousy filled her heart.

"I am forgotten," she thought; "Belinda has taken my place. Very well," she murmured,—
"very well. There is nothing left for me now but the grave. They'll all be sorry then!"

XXI.

MARGUERITE'S RETURN.

FRED saw Marguerite coming toward the group.

"Now she'll spoil all our fun!" he said.
"Why didn't she stay with the Rosses?"

Marguerite heard this, and she cast a look of anger at Fred. She shook hands with Belinda, but she did not kiss her. The boys noticed the coolness of this reception and Belinda's blush. It hurt her to notice that Marguerite did not seem glad to see her. Marguerite kissed her mother, who looked up brightly.

"Isn't it delightful here in the open air? It is a long time since I saw wild roses in the sunlight. Belinda and I have come to love each other already. She seems even dearer than if she were a niece."

"Oh, have you?" asked Marguerite, coldly.

"Dear me, just look at Aloysius' jacket! It is

full of dust and burrs. Just run up to the house and have Hannah brush it off,—it's disgraceful!"

"I won't!" cried Aloysius.

"You will!" retorted Marguerite.

"You're not his boss!" interposed Fred. "He's having a good time, and you just come and spoil it. He can't help getting burrs on his jacket when he crawls on the ground looking for last year's cones. Belinda is going to show us how to make cone baskets, and we're going to sell them to buy Chinese babies."

"Go right up to the house, you im-"

"You're another!" called out Aloysius. "I'll stay just where I am!"

Mrs. Laffan looked up at their faces, helpless and agitated.

"I suppose I had better go in," she said. "I really did not notice the burrs on Al's jacket,— I suppose," she said, with a sigh, "that I have interfered with the plans of the household in some way."

"You're the boss, mamma," said Fred; "we'll do what you say, but Marg has no business to spoil all the fun. Just because we're all happy,

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she comes and sees burrs and dust. She's always seeing dust or something,—always!"

Marguerite became more and more angry. She wanted to cry, but she felt that would be undignified. Mrs. Laffan's nerves were shaken by this encounter. The spray of wild roses fell on the ground.

"Nobody considers me," Marguerite said,—
"nobody! Here I come home absolutely tired
out, and this is the welcome I receive." She put
her handkerchief to her eyes.

Fred went out of reach, behind his mother's back, and did a wild dance, expressive of an Indian tomahawking some one.

- "Marguerite," answered Belinda, in a low voice, "It is aunt who needs consideration."
- "I don't want to receive lessons from you in my own home!" said Marguerite; and she walked, with her head in the air, toward the house. "Sweet, indeed!"
- "What is the matter?" asked the invalid, helplessly. "I never saw Marguerite behave so before."
 - "She is tired," Belinda said, "and not well."
 - "She'll go up to her room and read novels and

eat carmels," said Fred. "I have seen that girl have a whole box of candy and not give a fellow any, except the hard gumdrops, or the kind she had bitten to see whether she liked it or not. That's the truth!"

"Fred," whispered Belinda, "don't let your mother hear you talk that way; it will worry her."

Fred looked anxiously at his mother. Mrs. Laffan's thoughts were still full of her daughter.

"I had better go in," she said.

"That's just it!" exclaimed Aloysius. "Mamma wants to go in because Marguerite was ugly. Oh, dear! I knew she would spoil our fun."

Mrs. Laffan was taken into the house. And (for all of those who had been so happy a few moments before) the beauty of the day was spoiled by Marguerite's ill temper. It was as if a dark cloud had passed over a sunny wheat field.

Mrs. Laffan went to her room; and Belinda, having made her as comfortable as she could, went downstairs. Mr. Laffan had decided that this was to be a holiday, so there were no music-lessons. She gathered a bunch of mignonette and a blush

rose. Surely Marguerite would accept this as a peace-offering. As she passed softly over the tarn path, she came upon the boys busily eating green peas which they plucked from the vines. An hour before Belinda had heard Hannah begging and imploring them to take some peas into the kitchen for dinner.

"Oh, we just wanted you," called out Aloysius, his mouth full of peas and young pea pods. "Come to the stream and fish with us, please."

"I can't," answered Belinda,—"I have to do something else."

"And this is a holiday, too," said Fred, in an aggrieved tone. "I must be amused. When I was little, the nurse always said I'd get sick if I wasn't amused."

A well-aimed pea pod struck Fred in the eye.

"Stop your baby tricks," said Aloysius. "Do come with us, Belinda, and help to put bait on the hooks,—for, of course, girls can't fish."

Belinda smiled in spite of her trouble.

"Well, I will," she replied, "if you will wait. And in the meantime you get Hannah all the peas she wants for dinner."

- "Cert!" said Aloysius.
- "That's a bargain!" added Fred.

Belinda hastened to Marguerite's room. She knocked again and again. At last the door was half opened, and Marguerite appeared.

"Oh, it's you!" she said. "I don't want your flowers,—there!" And she slammed the door. Belinda sat down on the top step and wept.

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XXII.

HANNAH'S TRIAL.

MARGUERITE was unhappy, wretchedly unhappy, because she had a well instructed conscience and it reproached her. She picked up a novel and tried to forget everything in the story. But she could not. She looked in the glass, and tried to fancy that her face bore traces of her sufferings. But no: she seemed unusually healthy.

She sat by the window. What a lovely day it was! She longed to go out, but her injured dignity required that she should stay in seclusion. She heard merry shouts from the narrow stream that ran by the back lot, beyond the orchard of dwarf fruit-trees. She could see Belinda perched on a log holding a fishing rod. She had actually caught a perch,—it was too large to be a minnow. Fred was taking it from the hook with loud shouts. She put her head out of the win-

dow, to discover, if possible, what Belinda had caught.

At that moment Aloysius ran from the kitchen door with a new supply of bait. Marguerite had forgotten the book in her hand; it fell, and struck her brother on the shoulder. He picked it up from the ground.

"Ah, Miss," he said, "I've caught you reading novels! I'll just keep this and show it to papa."

Marguerite forgot her dignity, and implored him to give it back. It belonged to Miss Ross,—she must return it. Aloysius was obdurate: he pushed the book up under his jacket, at the risk of bursting the buttons from it, and ran away whistling, with "Lady Victoria's Defeat; or, The Prisoner of Lindhurst Manor," next to his heart.

Marguerite watched him. She must get the book back in some way; she must have it. It would not do to have anybody know that she read such stuff. And, above all, her father must not see it.

How was it that Belinda had obtained such an influence over those boys in a single day? A

few minutes before she had seen them actually carrying a big basket of peas into the kitchen, at Belinda's request,—a thing which neither threats nor commands from herself or Hannah had ever induced them to do. And Belinda seemed entirely at home; she and her mother seemed on the best of terms, and no doubt her father looked on Belinda as a paragon! Another pang of jealousy shot through Marguerite. What made Belinda such a favorite? Sister Clement never scolded Belinda; Belinda seldom had penances; everybody liked Belinda at the convent. Why was it? A sentence out of "Lady Victoria's Defeat" occurred to her. "Genius is always misunderstood and undervalued by the vulgar." Marguerite asked herself whether she might not be misunderstood because there was more in her than in other people. Perhaps, like Lady Victoria, she was a genius; Mrs. Gillflory had often said as much when she had told her how stern Sister Clement was. There was one comfort: Belinda had no "style;" she was the plainest little creature! And, then, she was not at all clever. Everything she knew she had acquired by the hardest work.

These reflections gave Marguerite great con-

solation, but they did not satisfy her. In her heart, she knew that she was not in accord with the high duties which a thoroughly Christian education had imposed on her. She began to think of the Rosses. She said to herself that none of them was really nice, except the Colonel. Casper was simply unendurable, and the Misses Ross were not at all nice. She smiled as she thought of the discomfiture of the timid Belinda in the society of the Rosses. How absurd she would seem in such society! Marguerite forgot her troubles in planning an elaborate luncheon for the Rosses, for the purpose of showing Belinda what her place in the social world really was. Belinda was a good girl-she did not deny that, -- and she liked her at times; but she needed taking down a bit.

"Margy! Margy!" called Hannah's voice.
"Come down. There be folk coming by the front walk!"

Marguerite did not answer; she ran through the corridor and looked out the window. The sunlight struck the glittering harness of Colonel Ross' drag. The Colonel had descended; coming up the path were Miss Ross, Eveline Marr (one of the Rosses' guests), and Casper. Marguerite looked at her watch: it was a little after twelve o'clock.

"They'll stay to luncheon," she said. "Oh, dear, what a horrible thing! And I haven't time to dress, and there's nothing in the house! Oh, I shall be mortified to death!"

She hastily ran toward her room, to find Hannah waiting for her. Sister Clement's maxim in all difficult occasions was, "Be cheerful; forget yourself; make the best of things." Marguerite remembered, but rejected it.

"Your fine friends are here, and your father will never let them leave the house without a bite to eat. You'll have to keep them somewhere, while I change the tablecloth and the napkins; for they're none o' our best. I'll get out the one with the thistle on; for I hear the Rosses have Scotch blood in them."

"I'll not come down," said Marguerite,—" I'll not! I can't be mortified to death by the country look of things and the boys' manners."

"It's a pity you don't change the boys' manners, then!" said Hannah, indignantly. "And so you'll leave the whole brunt of keeping up decency in your ain father's house to me! I didn't think you were so selfish, Margy."

Marguerite frowned. "You can just do the best you can. Say I'm sick." She closed the door.

Hannah went down in great distress.

"And you wee bit lassie can't be of much use," she said, thinking of Belinda.

As Hannah went down, a horrible thought struck Marguerite. Hannah and the boys would probably speak of this meal as "dinner." What would the Rosses, who always had luncheon in the middle of the day, think? She threw herself on the lounge in despair. Her announcement of sickness prevented her from calling to Hannah to avoid the obnoxious word "dinner."

Hannah was relieved to see Mr. Laffan join Colonel Ross. She ran hastily down to the stream to notify Belinda. Belinda was horrified; the boys ceased their fishing to listen to Hannah's tale of woe.

"I haven't a flower to put on the table, and there's nothing but corned-beef and cabbage—we always have it on Saturday,—and gooseberry tarts; and I'll have to change all the linen. We have lots of the most beautiful Irish linen, but it will take time to get it out. And, then, you know what the lads are,—not that they're worse than others."

"We'll go and howl and tread on the people's toes," said Fred; "and I'll made Morfido snap at them. They'll spoil all our fun."

Belinda thought of Sister Clement's maxim with some fear and trembling—" Be cheerful; forget yourself; and make the best of things."

"Don't worry, Hannah," she answered.
"Where are they?"

"Mr. Laffan is talking to them."

"Oh!" said Belinda, relieved. "I'll help you make the table as pretty as possible; and then I'll put on a clean collar, and go in and play something, to keep them till you're ready."

Hannah's face brightened somewhat. "Will you?" she said.

"Fred," said Belinda, suddenly assuming an air of authority, "if you don't do exactly what I tell you, I'll not show you how to make the kind of bait the perch like, after dinner."

Fred eyed her intently. "Well, go on," he said.

"You get all the roses you can, with long stems—as long as you can cut them. There, take my scissors,—don't pull the roses off. Bring them in through the kitchen; then run upstairs, put on a collar and cuffs, brush your clothes and comb your hair."

"Sha'n't I wash my hands and face?" asked Fred, still eyeing her obediently.

"Of course."

"And you, Al,—you run to the barn for eggs; will you? I needn't tell you to look nice and clean. You mother will like it so much."

Fred ran off, thinking of the bait; and Aloysius rushed headlong toward the barn.

"Heaven bless you!" said Hannah. "Come! There's no time to lose."

At this moment Colonel Ross was explaining to Mr. Laffan that a wheel of his drag had come loose; and that, as it was impossible to get back in time for luncheon (he had sent the carriage to the shop in the village), he must take the liberty of asking for a bit of luncheon and meet that charming daughter of his.

Mr. Laffan was delighted; he was, above all, hospitable.

"There's no cake in the house," said Hannah, in a whisper. "And it's my opinion that the beef is too salty. Why don't people eat their meals in their own houses?"

XXIII.

MARGUERITE LISTENS.

MARGUERITE, sulking in her room, thought, with some satisfaction that things would go badly downstairs. It was sad enough to have Colonel Ross and Casper and that stuck-up guest and Miss Ross see how badly the housekeeping was It would be plain, however, that she managed. was not responsible for it, as she would not be present. She crept to the head of the stairs on tiptoe, expecting to hear wails of woe from the lower regions. Now Hannah would learn to be more amiable to her; now Belinda would realize her own helplessness; now the boys would be brought to a sense of her necessity in the house. She expected to hear Hannah's voice raised and the noise of the boys. But there was silence, except for the clattering of plates.

Belinda had been frightened and perplexed when she had been obliged to go to Hannah's assistance. But she became cool after a time. She could only do her best,—that was all.

Having sent Aloysius and Fred away for a time, Belinda returned in haste to the kitchen. She found Hannah in tears, and greatly discouraged.

"I'll never be able to get the linen out in time," she said. "And I have taken everything off the table; and it will take half an hour to get out the best dishes and to dust them. I may just as well give up altogether."

Belinda looked into the dining-room. The table was bare. It was an old-fashioned table of real mahogany, with elaborate carvings on each corner, which seemed very fine to Belinda. She looked at the table-cloth which Hannah had taken off, and knew that she could never be induced to put it on again. Sister Clement had taught Belinda that simplicity must always be worthy of respect. A person who laughs at what is honest and simple must be a creature of a low order. She remembered now that Sister Clement had often said: "Give what you have, and give

it cordially." If the Colonel and the rest of the company could be made to see that the luncheon was cordially given, perhaps they might overlook deficiencies. But here was poor Hannah standing by the range with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"What a beautiful table, Hannah!" said Belinda. "I never saw anything so bright and smooth."

"It makes my elbows ache to keep it so," grumbled Hannah. "It belonged to Mrs. Laffan's mother, and I've never seen anything like it on this side of the water. But the trouble is we've nothing decent to put on."

"Why cover it up, then?" asked Belinda. "Here are the roses,—thanks! thanks!" she said, as she received a great bunch of long-stemmed pink roses. "We'll put these in a big bowl in the centre of the table, with the lace-bordered cloth under it, and serve the luncheon on the mahogany. Wouldn't that do?"

"I never saw it done," said Hannah. "I am afraid it would look as if we wanted to show off the table,—not but what it's a beauty."

"So we do," answered Belinda; "let us be

frank about it. See, Hannah—here a thistle and a rose and a beautiful shamrock carved in the corner."

"We'll try it; and, now that I remember, Libbie Johnstone told me that they used always to serve the sweets on the mahogany. But the luncheon—"

"Broil the chops—keep the beef for the boys,—and serve them hot with rolls and coffee. You have the rolls ready, and I am sure that Colonel Ross never tasted such rolls. And you can put that big dish of raspberries with cream on the table, and help them after they have finished the chops."

Hannah drew a long breath. She felt somewhat relieved.

"Ain't she a crackerjack?" asked Aloysius, who had been listening. "And she says we can have all the corned-beef and cabbage, too, in the kitchen. Ain't she a daisy?"

Belinda had no time to express her dislike for slang. She arranged the glass bowl of flowers on the shining mahogany, and laid Hannah's napkins about to save the smooth surface from the hot dishes. The great bowl of roses looked very

pretty, and scented the room. Hannah smiled and said:

"You can go and keep the folk from coming in here till I am ready. It won't be very long."

Belinda rushed upstairs so quickly that Marguerite, who had been trying to listen, could hardly save her dignity by getting into her room in time. It did not take Belinda long to add a touch or two to her dress. She went down again, her first fright coming over her a little. But she forgot it when Mr. Laffan introduced her, and she saw how pleased he was to see her. He had been wondering why his daughter and her friend had not appeared.

Belinda looked like a school-girl beside Miss Ross and her friend, whose girdles jingled with trinkets of various kinds, including a glass flagon and a silver whistle.

The conversation had become rather slow. Colonel Ross would not smoke before luncheon, and Casper did not dare to pull out a cigarette with Mr. Laffan's eyes on him. And everybody was hungry. The Colonel brightened a little when Belinda entered.

"I hoped to see your charming daughter, Mr.

Laffan," he said. "I see you have other rosebuds in your house, though."

"I am afraid that my daughter has enjoyed your hospitality too much, Colonel; she is weary, no doubt, after her gayety."

"She was very kind to come," said Miss Ross; while Casper yawned, and wondered whether there would be anything to drink or not.

"May we have some music?" Mr. Laffan asked of Belinda, and wishing that he were sure Hannah was not in a bad humor.

"Oh, do sing! Some of you young ladies sing, I know."

Belinda went to the piano. Her first impulse was to ask Miss Ross to play; but as that young woman looked too lazy to take off her gloves, she said nothing. She chose "The Winter Roses."

"The sky is like the water,
Gray as the hue of lead,
The fisher's little daughter
Weareth black upon her head;
The boughs that wave above her
Are gray with winter frost,
And all the hearts that love her
The bridge of death have crossed.

"I hear no children's voices,—
Silent the fisher's maid,—
No gladsome soul rejoices
Where bold boys used to wade
In summer, in the sunlight,
When days were sweet with song,
And the wide beach was smooth and white,
Not strewn with wrecks along.

"Ah, see the winter roses,

Hedged round with greenest moss,
Each curled leaf encloses

A fragrant balm of loss;
And, though there is no breaking

Of the grayness overhead,
They teach of an awakening

Of life that is not dead.

"See how they glow and quiver,
See how they nod and bend,
While all the world's a-shiver,
They sparks of ruby send;
Like firelight in the garden,
Heart-shaped and red as flame,
They speak of love's sweet pardon,
From out their mossy frame.

"Ah, gray and winter weather,
I wish your days were done,
My heart and hopes together
Could open to the sun;
O roses, winter roses,
I feel your lesson deep,
No gray day ever closes
But leaves us joy to keep."

"What's that? It's new, isn't it?" asked the Colonel.

"O papa, of course you know it! It is the new song—everybody is talking about it," said his daughter. And then she whispered to Casper: "How stupid papa is to show what he doesn't know before these people!"

Belinda had sung so tastefully that she was asked to play again; but, although she chose a short, simple thing, she did not play it well,—her thoughts were occupied with Hannah in the kitchen. Had something happened? Was there to be luncheon or not? At last when Belinda, in desperation, had played her little nocturne three times, the curtains between the rooms parted, and Hannah said:

"Dinner—I mean luncheon—is served,—and it isn't much!" she added in a lower tone, which she fancied nobody could hear, but which was plainly audible.

The dining-room was cool and rose-scented. At one end of it was Mrs. Laffan's tall, old-fashioned coffee-urn, at the other the high stand of raspberries, and in the centre the great bowl of

roses. Hannah saw with delight that they were reflected brightly on the mahogany.

"Dear me," whispered Miss Ross, "I didn't think they had so much style!"

Marguerite, above, was listening intently; but she did not hear this.

"A magnificent tea-urn!" said the Colonel, rubbing his hands, as the chops and omelet were brought in.

"It is all we have of splendor," said Mr. Laffan, pleased; and, turning to Casper, "You know what Horace says,—

"'' Vivitur parvo bene, cui paternum Splendet in mensa——'''

"All right, sir!" Casper said. "I recognize 'mensa.' It's the first declension."

Belinda looked at him.

"He doesn't understand," she thought. "If I were a young man, I should learn everything worth knowing. I wish I knew enough Latin to make that out."

"I never went to college, but Casper has; I've spared no mone you his education," said the Colonel. "It would make your hair stand on end to know what I have spent on him—capital chops! What a cook you must have!—I have spent thousands on him. Translate that, sir!" he said to Casper.

Casper blushed, and Mr. Laffan came to his relief, with a laugh.

"Horace is out of fashion in America," he said;
"I only meant to say that 'he lives on little well
who decks his plain table with an old bit of silver
like that."

Casper looked happy.

"Will you bring in the sherry?" asked Mr. Laffan of Hannah.

"No, sir!" said Hannah, promptly. "It is against my conscience to bring in any liquor while that boy is at the table," pointing to Casper. "I'll make no halvers about givin' drink to grown folk, but you ought to know me better than to ask me to give sherry to a boy like that."

Casper blushed again. Marguerite heard this. She threw herself on the bed with a groan. What would her fine friends think of her?

Belinda poured the coffee, and the luncheon proceeded,—not without some giggling from the

girls, as they looked at Casper. The Colonel praised everything; and the visitors could see nothing to shock the English prejudices, they had as good, fashionable Americans, acquired.

They went out to the lawn and sat on rustic chairs. The Colonel said he was so comfortable that he did not care how long the man kept the brake. He admired the luxuriance of the beds of mignonette and heliotrope. Marguerite stepped out on the balcony at the end of the corridor and heard the talk. She was entirely hidden by the Virginia creepers. The Colonel began to sing her praises.

"She is so simple, so charming, so modest,—just what a convent girl ought to be. I wish my girls would read the right things," said the Colonel. "Your daughter seemed quite familiar with a very high-class set of books; mine read trashy novels."

Miss Ross called Fred and Morfido to her. They are both nasty creatures, she said to herself; but they are better as friends than as enemies. Fred, his face shining and his collar very stiff, approached her, with one eye on Belinda.

"You are going to teach us how to make the

new bait,—sure? If you don't, I'll make Morfido snap," he whispered to Belinda.

"I always keep my promises," she whispered in return.

"All right." And he and Morfido permitted Miss Ross to talk to them. Her friend lounged on a rustic sofa, and tried to appear awake. The Colonel went back to literature.

"Your daughter, Mr. Laffan, seemed to know something about Goldsmith. 'The Deserted Village,' she said, was a favorite of hers. You don't hear many girls talking of a classic like that."

Mr. Laffan looked delighted; and Marguerite, behind the Virginia creepers, felt that she could live again.

"I picked up a book in our house the other day, and dipped into it, and, by Jove, Mr. Laffan, it was the most idiotic trash! It was called 'Lady Victoria's Defeat.' Nobody but a fool could find any pleasure in it."

Miss Ross pretended to be busy with Fred, but her face reddened.

"What are they talking about?" asked Fred.

"Books," said Miss Ross.

Never had Fred been so anxious to be good, never so anxious to give pleasure to every one about him. A full meal of corned-beef and cabbage enjoyed in the kitchen, a clean collar, and Belinda's approval, made him feel unusually anxious to do right. He unbuttoned his jacket and pulled out a book.

"I have seen that novel reviewed," said Mr. Laffan. "From what I hear, it is not only trash, but dangerous trash. I am glad to say that my daughter has no taste for books of that sort."

"Here's one," said Fred, taking a volume from under his jacket. "Marg loves this book; she was reading it all the morning. She dropped it, and Al picked it up."

The Colonel took it, with an indulgent smile, and arranged his spectacles to look at the title.

"What!" he said, suddenly. "'Lady Victoria's Defeat'! The very book we were talking of!"

Miss Ross and Casper laughed. Mr. Laffan took the book, looking amazed. Marguerite burst into tears and left the balcony.

XXIV.

WOUNDED VANITY.

MARGUERITE was disgusted with the world. Even Colonel Ross would not believe in her now. She might just as well run away. There was no pleasure for her anywhere; the world was against her. She resolved to go to Mrs. Gillflory's; there, at least, she would be appreciated. She thought bitterly of Belinda; what right had she to come in and take possession of the house?

Marguerite wept; for although she had been graduated, she was much of a girl yet. She wept, and washed her face with cologne water; and wept again. She said to herself that nowhere in the world was there anybody so unhappy as she was,—nobody in the world could be so unhappy!

She looked out of the window, to see the Ross party driving away in a stately fashion, with Belinda, her father, and the boys waving their hands. Nobody remembered her. What must the Colonel think of her!

You can easily see that Marguerite's vanity was wounded, and nothing hurts so much as that. To think that Colonel Ross, who had admired her so much, should have been led to have a false estimate of her by the discovery of that foolish book! And, then, to think that Belinda Murray, who had not been so clever as she was at school, should have begun to do what she had failed to do—gain the love of the boys and make her mother's life happier! She would go away to Mrs. Gillflory's, since Belinda had taken her place in the household.

She wept again when she reflected on the favors she had shown Belinda,—and this was her gratitude! She heard laughter below her window; and, in spite of her grief, she looked out. Her mother was in the wheel-chair; Belinda was pushing it, and the boys on either side, were flourishing their fishing rods and bait.

"Oh, we shall catch everything now, mamma!" said Fred. "Belinda has kept her promise, and made us the new bait."

Belinda—always Belinda! How she hated the very name!

"I wish Marguerite were with us!" she heard

her mother say. "I should be happy then. Why, Belinda, I did not expect a month ago to be out in the air to-day! You must have some charm in you."

Belinda again!

The party went on toward the stream, and Marguerite returned to her thoughts. She began to be hungry, but her dignity would not let her leave her room.

After a time Hannah came upstairs to Marguerite, with a tray and a letter.

"I thought you'd like a cup of tea, though you don't deserve it," said Hannah. "I never thought that you'd play me such a trick, Margy."

Marguerite took the tea and rolls.

"I really don't know what you mean, Hannah," she said. "I simply declined to be made a fool of. I knew how silly I should look doing the honors with such old-fashioned things as we have."

"Old-fashioned!" said Hannah, indignantly. "They're good enough for your father and mother, and for any Ross that was ever born. And I can tell you that I heard Miss Ross say that she was going to set a luncheon table like ours

just as soon as she could. And the Colonel said it reminded him of a meal he had at some grand place in England. If it was no' for Belinda, I should have had to hang my head in shame."

"Oh, Belinda!" she said, with a sneer. "I am tired of hearing her name!"

Hannah turned away and went downstairs. It was the first time she had ever had a real quarrel with Marguerite, whom she loved dearly. Her heart was full of sadness; she was indignant, and yet anxious to make excuses for her Margy.

Marguerite drank her tea, and opened the letter. It was from Mrs. Gillflory.

"MY DEAR NIECE:—Some friends of mine are going to Saratoga. It will be very gay there, and I want you to come with me. You poor cooped-up little thing! will for once in your life have a really good time. You can have as many dresses as you like, and do just as you please. So come at once."

Marguerite tore the letter up. Here was her chance; she knew very well that her father would not let her go. She made up her mind to steal away. When she was gone, he would understand

what she had suffered. Letters would come from Saratoga—perhaps even printed in the papers—telling how delighted everybody was with her. And then Belinda would see that Marguerite Laffan was somebody,—and somebody not to be trampled on by a false friend!

XXV.

THE EFFECTS OF SELFISHNESS.

MARGUERITE'S conduct had cast a gloom about her. Hannah, in the kitchen, sighed every now and then; Mr. Laffan, at his desk in his office, felt gloomy and unhappy; Mrs. Laffan, enjoying the balmy air as only an invalid used to the house can enjoy it, was still a little restless; and Belinda knowing that Marguerite was offended, could not share the happiness of the boys.

Aloysius and Fred and Morfido laughed and shouted and even howled with delight. It is a mistake to think that dogs cannot laugh. When Fred caught a fine perch, Prince grinned from ear to ear; and Morfido snapped his teeth, twinkled his eyes, and actually giggled. The boys and the dogs were not at all affected by Marguerite's attitude. The new bait, which Belinda had compounded after the manner she had learned at convent picnics, seemed to be suited to the taste of the perch in Mr. Laffan's stream.

If Belinda had been able to make real baseballs, the boys would have been her slaves. As it was, they were her friends. But still, her heart was heavy and she felt miserable.

Ill-temper and selfishness are drops that, like noisome liquid in a clear pool, discolor all the crystal brightness. Here were four people, who ought to have been contented and cheerful, made miserable by the selfishness and vanity of Marguerite.

Belinda began to feel how lonely she was. She had forgotten it since she came to the Laffans'. Even Marguerite, her only girl friend, no longer liked her. She looked at Mrs. Laffan's kind, serene face, and knew that she could love her; but, then, Mrs. Laffan had so many interests, so many people to love, that it would be hard for her to find a place for an orphan girl with no claims on her. She forgot to hold the rod, and let it fall into the water, much to Aloysius' disgust, as the plash frightened away a minnow which was quite large for its age. This reminded Belinda of one of Sister Clement's maxims: "Avoid self-pity; self-pity will make you forget your duties." With a sigh she adjusted the rod again.

Marguerite looked at a time-table, and determined to start for Chicago on the four-o'clock train. Her bag had not been unpacked. With the addition of a few extra things, she could manage very well until her aunt should give her the promised new dresses. She stifled all relenting thoughts. They did not want her at home; they preferred Belinda,—let them keep Belinda, then! Sister Clement would think she had done wrong; but Sister Clement was so holy that she did not understand the world. At any rate, why should she care? She would show her parents and the boys and Belinda that she would not be trampled on.

She determined to steal quietly, with her bag, to the corner of the road. There she could meet the omnibus on its way to the four-o'clock train. She had money enough for her fare; and she could telegraph, so that her aunt's carriage should meet her at the station in Chicago.

Marguerite, after looking around the pretty room, turned to the little altar on which the statue of Our Lord stood, with a red light burning before it. Hannah had kept the light glowing during her absence. She was about to kneel to say a

prayer, but she resisted the inspiration. She would not pray with her heart full of bitterness.

'For the first time she turned away.

Perhaps her father would never let her come back. Perhaps she might never see her mother again: perhaps she might die, or her mother might die. A mist came before her eyes—but she looked out the window and saw Belinda in the act of putting a shawl over her mother's shoulders. Belinda had no right to do that, she thought; and her mother had no business to smile so gratefully. How she hated Belinda! How glad she would be to get away! Even those imps of boys hated her. Nobody loved her, except Aunt Gillflory; and, of course, her father did not approve of Aunt Gillflory.

Marguerite knew she was doing wrong. There was a struggle in her heart between vanity and conscience. She could not do wrong without knowing it; and she turned her face away from the red light before the Sacred Heart, as she passed it on her way to get her bag. "Ungrateful girl!" her heart said. "Ungrateful girl!"

She took her bag in her hand. The benign face behind the red light seemed to follow her. Surely Sister Clement was praying for her at that moment.

She heard a noise on the stairs. Fred's voice sounded on the lower landing. She stood still, put her bag back, and began to descend the stairs to warn Fred not to come up. But Morfido rushed against her; she stepped aside, her ankle turned, and she sank on the landing with a low cry of pain.

XXVI.

THE MINISTRY OF PAIN.

MARGUERITE could not move, and neither Fred nor Morfido appeared in the least affected by her sad condition. They were so heartless, she thought.

"It just served you right!" said Fred. "You kicked that dog, and he is paying you back. Mamma sent me to see you, and to ask you to come down to the stream. The fishes are biting like mad."

Marguerite did not answer; the pain in her ankle gave her keen agony.

"What are you all dressed up for?" asked Fred, standing with Morfido on one of the lowest steps of the stairs.

"Take off my hat and jacket,—there!" said Marguerite, giving him her hat.

Fred saw by the expression of her face that she was in pain, and he pulled her light jacket from

her; and, for once obeying orders, took them into the room.

She felt relieved. Whoever came now would not know that she had intended to go away. She tried desperately to rise. It was impossible. Fred, really frightened, tried to lift her, but he succeeded only in increasing her suffering.

"I'll go and tell Belinda or Hannah," he said. And, with Morfido at his heels, he started off.

Marguerite, left alone, did not attempt to stir. She was sure that her ankle was broken. Visions of doctors, of knives, of cutting, made her blood run cold. Suppose she should die under the surgeon's knife, without time to repent of her sins? She would never again set her will up against everybody in the house; she would be more tolerant of the little faults of her brothers; she would devote herself to her mother, and think no more of her Aunt Gillflory's frivolities.

All these resolutions crossed her mind. Pain is a great corrector of faults; and, as she sat there on the stairs unable to move, she became very humble indeed. She would even forgive Belinda Murray. She had deliberately turned her back on the Sacred Heart, and she was punished. She

tried to turn, and uttered an involuntary cry,—
there could be no doubt about it, she would be
lame for life. To be unable to walk, to sit still
and see others in motion, to have to be waited on,
to be dependent on the kindness of those around
her, to be pushed about in a wheel-chair like her
mother! "Oh, I would rather be dead!" she exclaimed. Then she thought of how her mother
must have suffered all these years. She could
understand it now.

"O Marguerite!" spoke Belinda's voice, "I am so sorry,—don't try to move! Be still!" she added, as a look of pain crossed her friend's face. "I will get Hannah to come. It is nothing. You have only sprained your ankle."

"Are you sure?" asked Marguerite, in a weak voice. "I feel that I shall never walk again."

"It is nothing," repeated Belinda,—"nothing at all. It is only a little painful."

"Only a little painful!" said Marguerite to herself; "only!"

Belinda soon returned with Hannah and Aloysius. Fred, in the meantime, had cheerfully announced to his mother that Marg had broken both her feet off. Mrs. Laffan was in great distress at

first; but, as Belinda did not rush out to tell of any dreadful thing having happened, she tried to be composed.

Hannah, Belinda, and Aloysius managed to lift Marguerite to the lounge in her room. They did it as gently as possible, but they could not prevent Marguerite from having severe twinges of pain.

"I shall never walk again!" she declared.

"Oh, yes, you will!" said Belinda, smoothing her pillow. "Don't you remember the stout girl at school who sprained her ankle? Agnes Reed? Don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes!" said Marguerite, brightening up.
"She walks as well as anybody now."

Having made Marguerite as comfortable as possible, Belinda went to tell Mrs. Laffan of the accident; and Hannah proceeded with a sharp knife to cut off Marguerite's shoe, for the ankle had begun to swell.

Mrs. Laffan insisted on returning to the house. But she could not ascend the stairs until Hannah was disengaged. With the help of Hannah and Belinda, she reached Marguerite's room, and waited there until Aloysius arrived with the doctor.

"A bad sprain," the physician said. And, after making a careful examination, he announced that Marguerite would have to stay in her room for two or three weeks. She began to cry.

"It is nothing, my dear," her mother said.

"Think how long I have been a prisoner; yet, through God's grace, the days were not all lonely."

"It's not that, mamma,—it's not that. I am glad. It is what I deserved. I deserved, mamma," she exclaimed, "to be a cripple all my life!"

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Laffan. "I do not think your little faults deserved any such punishment."

And she smoothed her daughter's hair, and said all manner of kind things, as is the way with mothers.

Belinda looked on, forgetting herself in the happiness of these two. Hannah glanced over the screen, behind which she was tearing up linen for bandages, and, seeing Belinda's bright face, said:

"It's not always the bairns that have mothers deserve them as well as them that don't."

XXVII.

A PRISONER.

MARGUERITE'S two weeks in her room lengthened into four, and still she could not stand. The sprain was complicated in some way which the surgeon learnedly described, but which description did not ease the pain. However, he was very kind, and Marguerite was always glad to see him; and she was so grateful to him for not condemning her to perpetual imprisonment, that she was never cross or irritable.

Marguerite's room was large and light. She had never taken much pride in it, though it was capable of many improvements. Early in the first week of her illness Marguerite had quite forgiven Belinda. She could not help it. The long, sleepless nights of the first week, when she was alone with the little red light, made her see more clearly. She could do nothing but pray, and prayer is like a magnifying-glass to one's

faults and other folk's virtues. Besides, Belinda's deft fingers made the room very pretty and homelike. She found some old curtains in the attic, brightened them up, and hung their yellow folds in such a way that even on dark days the room was in a glow. She taught Aloysius and Fred how to make a flower-stand which glowed with all the hues of the rainbow; she hung up some neglected water-colors, and made a dressing-table which, looped with yellow and white, surprised and delighted Marguerite.

"I don't think I shall ever marry," Fred said; but if I ever do, it shall be Belinda. She knows how to do things that make a fellow comfortable. But even if I do marry somebody about my own age, I shall always have Belinda as house-keeper."

Mr. Laffan dropped his paper and smiled.

"And," continued Fred, "I almost wish Marguerite would sprain her ankle again as soon as she gets better."

Mr. Laffan looked horrified.

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Oh, she gives less trouble when she's in her room! She don't nag so much."

Mr. Laffan mused over these speeches.

Marguerite's room had become the meeting place of the family. It was the most cheerful place in the house. Mrs. Laffan spent the afternoons and evenings there; Mr. Laffan, instead of reading in his study, came up, too; and the boys did not now have to be coaxed out of the kitchen or the back-yard. Morfido and Prince were allowed to doze on the hearthrug, and Belinda had always a supply of new stories or games.

Mrs. Gillflory had sent a telegram from Saratoga—"So sorry! Hope you will get well."
But she had not written.

The Ross girls came over often with flowers and fruit; and, now that their friends were gone, they made opportunities for spending afternoons in Marguerite's room, with Mrs. Laffan and Belinda.

Marguerite saw with surprise that these fashionable young women looked on her simple, sincere, gentle mother as an example. They fluttered about her, and listened to her advice with a
strange meekness. And Belinda and they soon
became the greatest of friends.

"I only wish Casper were like your brothers,"

Miss Ross said, to Marguerite's amazement, one day. "Casper will not stay at home; he tries to be a man. And I am afraid he drinks when he goes to the village."

"Our boys are so rough!" answered Marguerite.

"But they are good, and they never disobey your mother or Belinda."

Marguerite did not reply. She had learned during these long weeks that the rulers of the house were ruled by unselfishness and cheerfulness. She saw that Belinda could conquer others because she could conquer herself.

The Ross girls came over nearly every day; and one day Mrs. Laffan asked them to bring Casper, to celebrate, with tea in the rose-arbor, the entrance of Marguerite into real life again. Casper came; the tea went off well; Marguerite walked twice around the arbor, with great applause and with evident approval from Prince and Morfido. But Casper found the whole thing "slow," and showed off all his affectations.

"It is our fault," Miss Ross said. "We never tried to keep him at home."

When Marguerite recovered, the old friendship

between Belinda and herself was restored. She tried to conquer herself, and the cheerful words of her father and mother, and the new opinion which her brothers formed of her, showed that she had succeeded.

"You have made us very happy," her mother said one day, as they sat together in the rose-arbor.

"I must not let you say that," replied Marguerite, her face flushing. "I must tell you how wicked I was. I wanted to—"

Mrs. Laffan put her hand over her daughter's lips.

"I know. Fred has sharp eyes and a willing tongue. Let us forget."

At this moment Belinda came up; and Marguerite, with tears in her eyes, put her friend's hand into that of her mother.

"Belinda," she said, "my mother is your mother now."

She was jealous no more; she had suffered for the first time in her life, and the pain had been as a ministering angel,—as pain with prayer always is.

XXVIII.

MRS. GILLFLORY.

UNEXPECTEDLY, one day in August, Mrs. Gill-flory made known her intention of visiting her brother. Her daughter was so much interested in all manner of gayeties that she had very little if any time to give to her mother, and Mrs. Gill-flory needed a great deal of attention. She liked to have somebody to wait on her, and so one day there came a telegram announcing that she was coming to carry off Marguerite.

Marguerite had really suffered. A badly sprained ankle may not seem of much importance, but it probably gives greater pain than more serious injuries. And it caused Marguerite to think and to realize what her mother had endured.

She was sitting in the rose-arbor when Fred brought the telegram, which her father had sent to her. Fred, of course, was accompanied by Morfido, who enjoyed himself in the summer because it was not winter. Morfido, having no

hair on his back, could not stand the winter in this country without great inconvenience. He had become more imp-like than ever. Fred held the yellow envelope in his hand, and Morfido yelped and jumped at it. Fred enjoyed this, and he kept out of reach of Marguerite, who reclined in a steamer chair, reading "Le Journal d'Eugénie de Guérin," with a dictionary at her elbow. She was in a serene mood; she had borne her part of the household burdens in the morning, earned a word of praise from Hannah, written a letter in French to Sister Clement, and now she was waiting until her mother had her nap, to help her to the wheel-chair.

Fred and Morfido danced around her, Morfido's eyes gleaming with mischief. Fred grinned, jumped on one leg, screwed his eyes and nose up into horrible wrinkles, and otherwise "tantalized" Marguerite. Since she had recovered she was no longer "company," and Fred was not so sympathetic as he had formerly been.

It must be admitted that Marguerite longed to pull his ears and to choke Morfido—a little. But she had learned from Belinda that small boys may be reached by forbearance at times; and that

punishment, unless it descends in a deluge after awful thunders, is of very little use.

She kept her eyes on her book. Having disported himself sufficiently, the mischievous Fred at last gave her the telegram, and she thanked him.

"You don't scold or fuss. It's from Aunt Gill-flory. She is coming."

Marguerite read her aunt's telegram; and Fred ran away, for fear that he might be asked to carry an answer back to the office. Marguerite had thought over her life at the convent, and considered from her new point of view the trouble she had given the Sisters. How fractious and censorious she had been after each visit to Aunt Gillflory's! How impatient of the convent simplicity! She now saw that the convent rules, obeyed in the proper spirit, were a better preparation for home life than the pretentious existence at Mrs. Gillflory's. She saw very clearly that Belinda's tact, her devotion to duty, and her pleasure in little things, were the result of her acceptance of lessons learned in the convent.

Why, she thought, had Belinda, who was not

so clever as she was, got more out of the schoollife than she had? Mrs. Gillflory's influence had made her hate simplicity, and long for that artificial society which exists only in those circles that take the newspapers' social columns for their models. Probably if her parents had not seen the difference between her and Belinda, they would have thought she had been spoiled by her stay at the convent; whereas it was all the Sisters could do to preserve her from vulgar outside influence. Only so recently as at the last Commencement, Mrs. Gillflory had made a scene because the Sister would not let Marguerite wear a fashionable gown, with an enormous train of silk, that would do to "come out" in. She saw now that simplicity was best. The Rosses were fashionable, and yet they seemed worried: smarting under imaginary slights, and anxious for something they could not reach. She could not help sighing for a moment when she thought of the new games, dances, and music at Saratoga; but, after all, what did she know about them, except from her aunt's talk?

The train was due at noon. There would be scarcely time to meet it; and indeed, before

Marguerite could dress, the carriage in which Belinda had come crawled up to the garden, and Mrs. Gillflory descended. She was dazzling in heliotrope and fawn-color, and the powder came off her face as she kissed Marguerite on both cheeks.

"My poor, poor child," she said, "how white you look! Ah, why did you not come to me when you left that horrid school? I know my brother—dear honest man!—can never understand you; he never understood me! Now you shall come to me, my love, and look after my belongings and write my letters. Your own dear cousin has been engaged twice since she saw you, and here you have pined, as it were, on the parent stem. I shall start back to-morrow. I knew that nothing but my presence would force your papa to let you go."

Mrs. Gillflory stopped for breath; it was hard work, she always said, for a delicate vocal organ like hers to keep up with her thoughts. She twitched her train with her left hand, adjusted her hat with her right, and dabbed more powder on her niece's cheek.

At this moment Fred and Morfido came up.

"What a sweet child!" Mrs. Gillflory said.
"How he has grown! What soft color!—a real Murillo."

"I ain't!" said Fred. "You're another."

"Dear me!—how rural!" observed Mrs. Gill-flory, smiling. "Come, kiss me, child."

"I won't," said Fred. "I'll make Morfido snap at you. I don't want to be kissed: you'll leave flour all over my face, and Belinda made me wash it once to-day."

"Am I really so pale?" asked Mrs. Gillflory.
"I have suffered so during your illness. It has left its traces."

Marguerite asked the driver to carry Mrs. Gill-flory's luggage to the house, and Fred and Morfido followed the man.

As Marguerite and her aunt went up the path they met Belinda, fresh and rosy, coming down with a bunch of flowers for the little shrine in the rose-arbor.

"Ah, the governess?" asked Mrs. Gillflory, putting up her long-handled eyeglass.

"She is my friend, Belinda," answered Marguerite. "You have heard me talk of her."

"Ah, yes, I believe so!" Then Mrs. Gillflory

raised her arm high in the air, and dangled her hand toward Belinda.

Belinda looked at Marguerite, but gained no help there.

"Shake hands, my child,—do! How painfully unformed you are! Dear me, those convents! You are quite in the style, but so much of a child! And here my own dear girl was engaged twice before she went abroad!"

Belinda grasped her hand, and, in her confusion, dropped a low courtesy.

"How quaint! Quite the presentation courtesy! Do you write a good hand, my dear, and can you mend a little?"

"Yes, Sis—yes, Mrs. Gillflory," replied Belinda, divided between awe and a desire to giggle.

"Well, if dear Peggy's papa refuses to let her go, I think I might make you equally useful. Indeed, I begin to feel that probably Peggy had better stay at home; she is looking pale, and I am afraid she could not help me at all. You look so strong? Do you really write a good hand? Peggy's is not English, you know—I really can't call her Marguerite; everything French is so old-fashioned, you know. The really old names are

in again; I assure you Peggy Popkins and Molly Killgren are quite the smartest girls in our set."

Mrs. Gillflory beamed on Belinda, and linked her arm in hers.

"You look as if you liked work," she said.

"Of course you'll have a good time; for now I see Peggy's not up to what I require. She dared not look at Marguerite. So this artificial, chattering creature was her ideal of womanhood! Marguerite cast down her eyes; her heart was bitter. Belinda was preferred again! She caught a look in her friend's honest eyes that consoled her.

The meeting between Mr. Laffan and his sister was not particularly cordial. It was observed that she wiped off some of the powder before she greeted him, and that the modish handshake was not produced.

She had heard Belinda play, she had made her talk—her accent was better than Marguerite's,—she made her walk. She declared enthusiastically that she could make a companion of the dear girl, as Marguerite was so ill. Later she might have Marguerite, too. Marguerite's lip curled. These were the affection and the ideas she had

preferred to Sister Clement's to her father's and mother's!

Mrs. Laffan was well enough to come down to the porch in the twilight for tea. They sat under the broad leaves of the Dutchman's Pipe, while Marguerite made the tea.

"Well," said rs. MGillflory, "I suppose I may take Belinda to-morrow?"

Fred swallowed two lumps of sugar, so that they scraped his throat; he opened his eyes. Aloysius glanced at his aunt.

- "I leave it to Belinda," said Mr. Laffan.
- "No, I thank you," answered Belinda, from the twilight.
- "Then Marguerite," said Mrs. Gillflory,—"that is, if Belinda, won't come."
 - "No!" said Fred.
 - " No!" cried both he and Aloysius.
- "We shall not let Marg or Belinda go! So there!" said Fred.

The rulers of the house had spoken.

Tears filled Marguerite's eyes; she stooped and kissed the little boy, and even patted Morfido.

The next day Mrs. Gillflory went off alone.

XXIX.

A DOOR OPENS.

LIFE went very quietly at the Laffans for some months. Belinda found a few music pupils in the village; but they were very few, and not nearly so clever as her Jewish class of department of the old days in New York. Still, what she earned enabled her to buy her simple clothes, and to this Mr. Laffan, respecting her desire to be independent, did not object.

As the months went by, Belinda threw off the sadness that had settled on her since her grandmother's death, and broke out occasionally into that gayety which had been part of her character as a little girl. She had been cheerful, of course, since she had come to the Laffans', but her cheerfulness was very many times a matter of duty. Her experience in New York had not heightened her spirits. Then came the greatest blow of all, —her dear grandmother's death. The Sisters in

the convent had done all they could to console her, but the pain remained. And then there was that uncertainty about life,—the ways and means of living,—which some young girls are forced to consider too early in their years. The little Belinda in Washington had bloomed as the flowers bloom;—there would be always light and air and always the dear grandmother. Why should she think about the future? This condition of things had ended, as we know. Even Amélie, on whom she had tried to mould herself, was gone for the present at least. Bob was away, and if, as she had said often to herself, she had not made friends of the saints, she would have had no family at all! Under the weight of her grief,-which she kept to herself-and, desiring, above all, to do her duty, she had proved of great service in the Laffan household; and no family could have shown itself more grateful. She was not only a friend, but a cousin. At the same time Belinda began to feel that she was sometimes a little in Marguerite's way.

It was evident that the boys preferred Belinda; she was not "grown up;" it was plain, too, that Mr. Laffan was coming more and more to depend

on her for his amusements in the evening. And once she caught sight of Marguerite's face when he unconsciously wounded his daughter by saying, "Oh, don't try to make the tea, Marguerite; nobody can make tea like Belinda."

Besides, in Belinda's heart there was growing a desire to be free to earn her own living. She knew that Mr. Laffan could, in the future, barely provide for his own children. The glimpse of life in New York had made her very practical,—much more practical than most young girls of her age and class. She was poor, and she accepted it; but she determined to be poor no longer than she could help it.

Neither Amélie nor the Watson girls would have had this point of view. It would never have occurred to Marguerite, who had been protected all her life. Amélie would probably have been poor very gracefully and not have murmured; Marguerite would have been entirely helpless; but Belinda had resolved not to be helpless. Mr. Laffan was astonished when, during their usual walk in the evening, she said,—

"Uncle, I want money."
Mr. Laffan laughed.

"Well, you can have it,—but don't, my dear, talk as if you were a highwayman."

Belinda laughed, too, with a hint of the old gayety of the days when she and Bob Watson had been such good friends.

"I mean that I want to earn it."

"Why," her uncle asked, startled, "haven't you everything you need?"

"Oh, yes,—you give me a beautiful home, and more than that a thousand times;—you and my aunt treat me as if I were your daughter. But if Fred should be ill again,—if anything—" she paused, "should happen, I should be dependent and very poor. Voluntary poverty, such as the nuns embrace, is different; it makes them happy. I don't think I shall be a nun, but I have an idea that Amélie will be one, so voluntary poverty is out of the question for me."

Mr. Laffan ceased to swing his stick; he paused, smiled, and then laughed.

"Why, you talk like a grown-up woman, not like little Belinda."

"Uncle," said Belinda, seriously, "I suppose that if I had not lived among the poor in New York, I shouldn't feel this way. I suppose it looks hard and practical. Oh, I know, Uncle, that you are going to say that you'll always treat me as you treat Marguerite; but—"

"I may die," her uncle said, gently. "Don't be afraid to say it. I think of it every day. And I couldn't bear to think of it at all if I did not trust in God; I am doing my best, and He will take care of me and mine."

"But I am not doing my best," Belinda said.

"And I must do my best; I teach a little and I earn two dollars a week, if the children are not sick or if it doesn't rain or snow; but I ought to do more than that."

"You are the light of the house! You've simply reformed those young rascals of mine; they're really very nice boys now. That's doing a great deal, isn't it?"

"You are very kind, Uncle." Belinda stooped to pick a handful of wild asters.

"A woman's place is at home, and a girl who expects to be a noble woman ought to stay at home; this, Belinda, is your home. Your aunt will tell you so."

"I know that." Belinda's eyes filled with tears.

"My aunt is like a mother to me."

"And Marguerite?-Marguerite loves you."

Belinda turned away her face, to look at the sunset. Marguerite would love her more if she were not taking Marguerite's place.

"Marguerite is the kindest of cousins."

"The Sisters will tell you," Mr. Laffan continued, "that the place of women is the homemaker. Stay with us; you are sheltered here, and the world is very big and dark."

"Don't you think I know that, Uncle?"

Aloysius and Morfido rushed past them in a mad run,—Aloysius crying,—

"Belinda! Belinda! I am the Shamrock and Morfido is the Defender. He's a minute ahead!"

"See, how that little scamp loves you!"

"Don't you think I know that, too, Uncle. But I must make my own way. The Sisters impressed that upon me. I'm nineteen, Uncle."

"So old!" said her uncle, smiling. "Suppose you take a continued course in music. You can go back to the convent, and I will bear the expense. Something more can be done with your voice."

"Oh, I haven't much voice,—I might sing kindergarten songs,—that's about all; the Sisters

know that I would never do much with my music. I used to think I had talent."

"My dear, you have!" exclaimed Mr. Laffan, eagerly. "I've heard you play 'The Harp that Once' and sing 'The Meeting of the Waters' in a way that brought tears to my eyes. And, as to that little song, the 'Winter Roses,' I don't think Patti could have done it better."

"Oh, you dear Uncle!" said Belinda, stopping to put some of the asters into his buttonhole. "I wish the world could be made to think your way;—I'd give concerts at a thousand dollars a night, and save up enough to send the boys to college by and by, and to give aunt an ocean trip."

Mr. Laffan looked grave. Times were hard: the doctor had ordered an ocean trip for his wife, and, after that, the sum he had saved for the boys' education would be much diminished.

They were nearing the house.

"A letter from your sister, Mrs. Gillflory came in the last mail," Belinda said, "and I think it right to show it to you first."

Mr. Laffan put on his glasses, and took the letter, with a disapproving shake of his head.

"My DEAR BELINDA:" it ran, "I have had such a hard autumn. Three secretaries have come and gone; and I observed that, when you acknowledged the receipt of the lace handkerchief I sent you, you wrote a very nice hand, so I conclude that you'd better come to me as my secretary. I suppose, brought up in a convent, you must know something about the etiquette of notewriting,—I never let my secretary write really long letters,—and what you don't know, you can pick up. I'd ask Marguerite,—Peggy, I prefer to call her,—but, of course, I couldn't pay her or treat her just as I like to treat a secretary. When I pay people, I expect to say what I like to them—"

"My child," said Mr. Laffan, breaking off, "you'd never stand her."

"I'd stand more than that for the sake of earning my own living and something over," said Belinda, her cheeks flushing. She gathered another handful of the asters, which the frost had spared, and let her uncle go on with the letter.

"If you can come next week, I will give you sixty dollars a month,—mind, not fifteen dollars a week,—and your clothes,—for, of course, you

can't have as good frocks as I expect an inmate of my house to have. I am living in New York now, as you see; there will be house-guests with me this winter, cousins of yours, too, Claudia and Arnold Deresby. You will probably not have much time with them, for I am to bring Claudia 'out' and Arnold will attend musical courses at the Conservatory. I send a cheque for your expenses. You can show this letter to your uncle and aunt, who, I must say, are sensible enough to see that this is a great chance for you."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Laffan. He always said, "Well, well," when he was annoyed.

"Well?" echoed Belinda.

"I must consult your aunt."

Belinda put her arm within her uncle's. The two walked through the frost-touched asters, which, in the darkening shades, were so much like the ghosts of summer daisies. A chill came into the air, and one or two snowflakes fell.

"Winter will be here before Thanksgiving," her uncle said.

A pain seemed to go through Belinda's heart. Thanksgiving! And she should be far away.

A ruddy light streamed from the hall. The

boys ran out to kiss their father. Marguerite followed; but, when she saw Belinda, she drew back.

"I must go," Belinda said to herself. "I must go."

"We'll not speak of this until to-morrow," Mr. Laffan said, returning the letter to her.

"Oh, you and papa have a secret," Marguerite remarked, as the girls were changing their gowns for the evening meal.

"No!" Belinda kissed Marguerite, with tears in her eyes. "No. It is no secret."

More than ever was she resolved to go.

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XXX.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT.

AT breakfast the next morning Mr. Laffan announced that Belinda was expected to go for a long visit to Mrs. Gillflory's in New York city.

Aloysius and Fred raised their voices in protest.

"We can't do without Belinda," exclaimed Aloysius. "She sews all my buttons on. Before she came, I had to use safety-pins all the time. And she can make everything!"

"We're making some frames for Christmas gifts," piped Fred, "and I know that mine will get wrong if Belinda goes."

Marguerite was surprised. As her father made the announcement, she raised her eyes to meet those of Belinda.

"I am sorry,-really very sorry," she said, "but,

of course, you'll come home often. Oh, Belinda, what will I do without you," she added, remembering the various things which she hoped to accomplish with her friend's assistance. "There are all those lace collars for Christmas!—I can never design them, and I counted on them for so many presents!"

Mrs. Laffan said nothing; tears came into her eyes. She had made a great effort and had come down to the breakfast table purely because it was Belinda's last day.

"I don't know who'll help me with the desserts," began the privileged servant.

"It seems to me that all the reasons for keeping Belinda here are rather selfish reasons," Mr. Laffan said, "but I am sure there must be others not yet spoken. The worst of it is, that my sister wants Belinda to start on the midnight train, and I suppose she'll have to go."

"Alone?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"No," answered Mr. Laffan, "I have business in Rochester, and I can make it convenient to go now."

Mrs. Laffan smiled; she had urged this very strongly, and had made an unusual effort to ap-

pear better in health, that her husband might be induced to take this resolution.

"If Marguerite would like to go," Mr. Laffan said, "I should be glad to take her too; it will mean only an absence of ten days or so!"

"Oh," exclaimed Marguerite, eagerly, "I want to stay here;—I shall have mother all to myself."

Belinda looked down at her plate. The secret was out! Marguerite still loved her as a friend, —she was sure of that,—but she wanted her mother "all to herself."

"Morfido will not like it," said Fred, decidedly. "Nobody will like it;—Aunt Gillflory is rich, she told me so, why isn't she satisfied to let other people be,—Belinda belongs to us;—she's no kin to Aunt Gillflory."

"I must go, Fred," Belinda said, gently. "I'll never have any better friends than I've had here. Some day you'll have to go out to earn your own living,—we all,—that is, nearly all of us do,—and I hope that you'll have as good friends as I have to keep you in good courage."

Fred screwed up his face, preparatory to uttering a tearful protest.

"You'll see the circus!" he said, suddenly

changing his intention, as this beautiful thought occurred to him. "You'll see lots of things,—football matches, and perhaps a murder. They're always killing people in New York."

"Where did you get such ideas?" asked his father, sternly.

"I read about New York in a newspaper Ruprecht had at the barn. Something is always happening there. I wouldn't like to see a man killed, but I'd like to be in the fight. I say, Belinda, if you're ever in a fight, write to me,—a long letter."

"Look out for live wires;—in Ruprecht's paper people are always being killed by live wires. You know what a live wire is? You remember when one fell into our peach tree near the road?" cried Aloysius. "Live wires are lying about everywhere in New York."

"And bunco-steerers," pursued Fred, in great excitement. "Somebody will say,—'Miss, is your name Jones?' You will say,—'Oh, no, my name is Belinda Murray.' He will say,—'How do you do, Belinda.' And you will say,—'Very well, thank you.' He will say,—'I have a gold brick which is very cheap for all the money you have.'

You will say,—'Thank you,—I am glad to buy your gold brick.' But don't you do it!" cried Fred, breathlessly, "Don't you do it!"

"If you do," said Aloysius, taking up the thread of the discourse, "you will find that the brick is just a brick and no gold at all. Ruprecht told us about it. Then you will go to the police station and stay all night because all your money will be gone. People in New York when they buy gold bricks always go to the police station for the night. But don't you do it, Belinda!"

"I will not," answered Belinda, "I am not fond of gold bricks. Besides, your father will be with me, and I am sure that he can keep me safe."

"And, Oh, father!"-began Aloysius.

"Oh, papa," interrupted Fred, "don't ride in the trolley cars,—don't! Ruprecht, who used to work on a farm near New York before he went to Chicago, says that a man's life is not safe on a Broadway car. If you are not crushed, you're blown up—"

"Blown up!" cried Aloysius, taking up the thread of these horrors. "There are tunnels full of dynamite under every street,—just full! And all of a sudden you see your head blown off—"

"I must see Ruprecht," said Mr. Laffan, gravely, "and suppress his favorite newspaper as far, at least, as my little sons are concerned. Belinda, you must remember, lived in New York at one time, without losing her head or buying a gold brick."

The boys shook their heads.

"It's different now!"

"Besides," said Fred, "things never happen to girls. It's always men that things happen to;—so I suppose Belinda will get through all right."

"Let us hope so. And now," Mrs. Laffan said, "we must all get to work and help her and papa to be ready."

Belinda was accompanied to her room by Marguerite. There was much to be done, and Marguerite was very helpful.

For a time the girls said little.

"I shall hang my photographs just as they are here," said Belinda, during a pause spent in search of the Pond Extract bottle, "in my new room. I want to fancy that I am at home,—and, Marguerite, that toreador's sash which you gave me shall hang always behind your picture, just as it is here."

Marguerite looked at the dark-blue sash, embroidered with flowers of red and yellow, which a friend had sent her from Havana, and it occurred to her with new force that Belinda was really going,—that this room would soon be actually empty.

- "Oh, Belinda, I shall miss you! Why do you want to go?"
 - "Because I ought and I must; -it is better."
 - "How do you know that you will like it?"
- "I must like it; I shall earn my living and save money."
- "Oh, Belinda, you have no heart,--you are so practical."

Belinda smiled a little.

- "Marguerite, you will find that the practical people have hearts. There's my favorite St. Teresa. Do you remember how anxious she was that her pious brother should plan for the future welfare of his children? And St. Teresa had a good heart."
- "You take things so literally, Belinda. I should never think of bringing St. Teresa into our lives. You seem so cold at times."

Belinda sighed.

"So cold and so good."

Belinda drew her friend to the window-seat.

"Come, let's talk, Marguerite. I'm a little girl still at heart; if I've got on with your brothers, it's because I'm,—inside of me,—no older than they are. If I've tried to be kind to everybody in this house, it's because I learned, when I was in poverty and sorrow, that kindness is one of the greatest things in the world; but I'm not grownup at all, and I'm not good-or cold. I have learned that I must do some things,--that's all; and, since I became a Catholic, I have learned to know what Amélie Watson's life meant. It meant duty; it meant the living of her religion every day. It has been easy for me here. There has been lots to do; I came saddened, subdued; I was praised for everything I did. Now life is easy under these conditions;—it has not been so easy for you!"

Belinda reached out her hand, to take Marguerite's.

" No!"

There was silence.

"No!" repeated Marguerite, "it was hard for me. I was very foolish, I know; but, Belinda, you will not mind my saying what is in my heart. It was hard to think that your goodness had taken my mother away from me."

Belinda looked towards the window. She was tempted to make a reply that might wound her friend.

"I understand," she said gently, "Now you will have her all to yourself."

Marguerite tightly clasped Belinda's fingers, and made no answer. Belinda sighed.

"I have hurt you!"

"No, Marguerite,—no! It hurts me to go away from a dear home; but I have been too happy here. And I am almost afraid to go;—the old reckless Belinda is still in me;—I had things to do here, and I was appreciated; I don't know how it will be at Mrs. Gillflory's?"

"Promise me,—we have always been honest with each other,—that you'll come back if you don't like it there."

Belinda's face lighted up.

"Of course I shall;—I haven't any other home."

"I think your life will be hard with my aunt. There must be some good in her, since she's papa's sister, but, after the way she treated me, I have no confidence in her."

- "My business will be to obey her."
- "Oh, Belinda, it will be an awful life."
- "You're as bad as the boys;—you are trying to frighten me."

"No, no; -do stay!"

Belinda shook her head :- "I must go!"

- "You're afraid yourself."
- "Yes, I am:—I am afraid of myself. The old Belinda breaks out every now and then. Here I could model myself on Amélie; it was easy. But, opposed, annoyed, scorned, there's no knowing what I would say or do. If you hear bad reports of me from Mrs. Gillflory—"

"She wouldn't dare!"

Belinda laughed.

"You will know that I have earned them."

Marguerite threw her arms about Belinda.

"Oh, Belinda, I want you to stay and I don't want you to stay," she said sobbing, "I'm not jealous, but I must have mamma awhile all to myself. But next to mamma and papa, I love you! Believe me!"

After a time the girls dried their eyes, and packed the second trunk.

XXXI.

AN AWFUL THREAT.

BELINDA was in New York again. The moment the salt air of the Bay struck her in crossing the Ferry at Twenty-fifth street, the memories of her last visit to the great city came upon her; they were not entirely unhappy memories, but they were tinged with sadness. What changes had taken place! Her grandmother was gone, her uncle gone; -but she could pray for them; she could stretch out her hands in prayer for them; they did seem so far off. The sparkle of the water in the sunlight, a moving Cunarder and a big excursion boat with a booming brass band and the flags of all nations flying attracted her attention, and her uncle, guessing that she might be sad, kept up a fire of jokes that made her smile. The young have no right to live in the past, the old must; Belinda was young, and the present was veritably real. She was young; she was healthy; she had a clear conscience; and, when the first slight cloud lifted, she felt that there was nothing in the world she was afraid of except an offence against God.

Her uncle took a cab at Twenty-third street, and when they reached Mrs. Gillflory's apartment, opposite Central park, it was luncheon time. Mrs. Gillflory descended upon them with a hundred exclamations.

"Oh, you dear, dowdy little thing, you really have some style, or your country clothes would make an awful guy of you. My dear, dear brother!" she added, kissing Mr. Laffan and leaving a patch of powder on his nose, "how are they all? I quite adore all my nephews and my niece. Belinda, you will like your cousins, I'm sure,-Claudia's a sweet girl,—I'm going to bring her out in January. She has gone off to luncheon with a swell girl from Washington, Inez Fawcett,-did you ever meet her? And then she and Inez are going to a matinée." Mrs. Gillflory rattled on, giving nobody a chance to answer. "Now run into your room,—the passage, with the heliotrope portière, leads to it, -and brush your hair. Luncheon will be ready in ten minutes, and I've

ordered a vol au vent of sweetbreads and salad a la Macédoine, just to please your uncle; I know just what he likes."

"I detest sweetbreads, and I never ate a salad of that kind in my life," said Mr. Laffan, ungratefully. "A cup of coffee and a roll is all I need."

"How impolite! you ought to like my vol au vent;—I've a new cook. Run, Belinda; I've something very important to talk over with my brother!"

Belinda, adjured in this manner, made her way to a little room, in which she found a pink pincushion and several large towels marked with big "B's." She unpacked her brushes, and made a hasty toilet.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Gillflory, when Belinda had disappeared, "you have grown stout."

Mr. Laffan laughed. "Most people of our age grow stout."

Mrs. Gillflory sighed.

"I wanted to speak to you about Belinda;
I've taken a great fancy to the girl."

It was Mr. Laffan's turn to sigh; he looked at his sister, who seemed so worldly and artificial, and sighed again.

- "Don't spoil the child."
- "I never spoiled anybody in my life."
- "Oh, you'll pet her one minute and scold her the next;—and with as much reason for one as the other. She's a good little soul,—a mere child in heart, with plenty of self-control; but with possibilities for good and evil."
- "Why, you make her out quite a monster!" said Mrs. Gillflory, tired of the subject. "How doyou think that those heliotrope velvet hangings, fringed with silver, go with the Flemish oak in this drawing-room? I call it swagger."
- "On my word," said Mr. Laffan, irritably, "you are an incomprehensible woman;—I hope you'll not talk slang in Belinda's hearing."
- "You dear, old-fashioned person!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory, laughing in a carefully modulated manner. "I used that excessively swell word just to shock you. You ought to come out into the light; you're a cave dweller! Oh, by the way, I don't want Belinda to fall in love with Arnold."
- "Who's Arnold? On my word, Mary Ann—"
 - "That is not my name: I shall not answer you

if you use that detestable nickname," said Mrs. Gillflory, reddening.

"Oh, well, Henriette,—or anything you like to call yourself,—you exasperate me beyond endurance. Here's a nice, simple, well brought-up little girl—"

"She's nearly as tall as you—"

"Never mind, she has no thought of beaux and that sort of thing. She simply wants to earn her living; she asks, above all, to be reasonably independent. Here, this simple, well-bred child comes to you, and you propose to put false ideas into her head. Who's this Arnold?"

"Arnold Deresby;—he's twenty years of age. He's her cousin, you know, and a very artistic boy,—plays Chopin and Richard Strauss until I'm nearly mad; but he would come to the Conservatory, and, as their people have gone abroad, I just had to take them. Besides, they brace me up; I'm naturally of a melancholy and thoughtful disposition."

Mr. Laffan smiled.

"Of course, ií you don't think Belinda is likely—"

"Oh, let Belinda alone! Don't work her too

hard, pay her regularly, learn simplicity from her, and send her back to us whenever you can spare her," Mr. Laffan said, with a decision which always silenced his sister when he chose to be decided. "Now, where can I comb my hair?"

Mrs. Gillflory rang for the butler, who soon put Mr. Laffan in the way of refreshing himself and improving his temper.

Arnold Deresby, a tall, languid-looking boy, with long auburn hair, a necktie with flowing ends, and a look of dejection came in to luncheon. His brown eyes brightened when Belinda came in, her hair tied with a fresh ribbon, and with one of the white chrysanthemums she had found on her dressing-table in her belt.

"Are you musical?" he asked, eagerly, as soon as they had been introduced. "I have always longed consummately for a musical cousin." He drawled less than usual. Mrs. Gillflory looked pleased.

"Oh, yes, Belinda is musical; she sings the 'Winter Roses,'" said Mrs. Gillflory.

"I wrote the music for that," said Arnold, eagerly; "that is, I gave Woodward, the com-

poser the theme, and he harmonized it. You must sing after luncheon."

"I play little and sing less;" Belinda spoke half shyly. Arnold's tone, in spite of its interest, was decidedly patronizing. He seemed very much "grown up;" she suddenly realized that she was only a country girl, after all. "I used to sing to amuse my little cousins,—that's all."

Belinda wondered why all the old audacity and energy which had made her the "Belinda" of Bob Watson's approval had disappeared. She flushed; she wished that she could be the old Belinda only for a moment.

"Elle est jolie," Arnold whispered to his aunt.

"Thank you," Belinda said, raising her eyes, with a touch of her old spirit. "I have always wanted a good-looking cousin who appreciates good looks in others."

"Nobody ever accused me of being good-looking," Arnold said, frowning and forgetting his drawl.

Belinda had turned her attention to her uncle, who had entered, looking very fresh and much combed as to his hair and whiskers. Arnold seemed to have faded from her knowledge. The butler announced luncheon, and Arnold offered his arm to Belinda. She took it rather awkwardly, as she was not accustomed to this ceremony.

Mrs. Gillflory discoursed on her dining-room, which was walled with gold-etched black oak. A great bay window, which had a double sash of stained glass, gave a fine view of Central Park.

"This is very comfortable," said Mr. Laffan.

"I pay over six thousand a year for twelve rooms," said his sister, proudly.

Mr. Laffan dropped his fork.

"I call that reckless waste;—you could get a nice country-house for half that!"

"You are such a dear, old-fashioned soul!" she said, patting him on the back. "Try the potage à la Reine,—do, like an old dear."

"I thought it was bean soup," he said. "I must say I liked the oysters; you can't spoil them with a French name."

Mrs. Gillflory cast up her eyes to the ceiling, with the air of one who is martyred. Belinda smiled behind her napkin; she could not help thinking that, even if the boys at home had assumed this air of rusticity, her uncle would not

have tolerated it. After luncheon Arnold pulled out a gold cigarette case, studded with turquoise,—

"Will you smoke, Belinda?" he asked patronizingly.

Belinda laughed.

"Not so early, cousin," she said.

"Girls in New York smoke earlier than this very often. Will you smoke, Uncle?"

Mr. Laffan's eyes twinkled; he pulled from the inside pocket of his coat two corncob pipes. There was a twinkle in his eye.

"Belinda, when she smokes, always uses one of these. I smoke one every day after dinner."

"Oh, horror!" cried Mrs. Gillflory. "You don't mean to smoke one of those horrible things now! I am shocked!"

"A cigarette is just as bad as a corncob pipe, Aunt;" Belinda spoke, with eyes cast down and a twinkle in her eyes. "But, if you want me to smoke, I hope you'll let me have the corn-cob. We're more advanced in the country, cigarettes are not strong enough for us."

Mr. Laffan suppressed her only by putting the pipe-stem between her lips.

Arnold looked at Belinda in horror. What might this golden-haired, rose-colored girl, who seemed so simple, do next?

"Oh, horrors, aunt!" he whispered.

"Oh, horrors!" responded his aunt. "My curtains will be ruined with the smell of that horrid pipe!"

"I'm trying to drive away the odor of the cigarettes," Mr. Laffan said, placidly. Arnold excused himself, and left the room.

"Now, Mary Ann," said Mr. Laffan, turning to his sister, with firmness, "if you let that queer young puppy annoy Belinda with his idiotic airs, I'll address all your letters to 'Mary Ann Gillflory!"

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XXXII.

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A CLIMAX.

IF Mr. Laffan had wanted to put Belinda in good spirits, he could not have done better than to make his awful threat. After luncheon Mrs. Gillflory went into her room for her usual afternoon "beauty sleep," as she called it. Belinda laughed so much, as she bade her uncle good-bye, that she could not cry. She forgot tears as she thought of her uncle's solemnly smoking the corncob pipe. Mrs. Gillflory told Belinda to be ready for a drive at four o'clock, and, as her trunks had come,-Mrs. Gillflory adjured her to call them "boxes,"-Belinda was occupied in arranging her belongings until a tinkle from the silver clock on the Mexican onyx chimney-piece called her attention to the fact that it was halfpast three.

She had been thinking busily. She might see Father Belford very often now, and the

Pembrokes. She had not seen her other New York friends since her grandmother's death. She laughed aloud again, as a vision of Essie Wiedmeist as a "young lady" appeared before her. And where were the Leos? She resolved to hunt them all up as soon as she could.

"I shall do my work well, save every cent," she thought, "and, if when I have some money, Fred is still well, I'll send for Amélie, buy the old house on Capitol Hill, and live there forever after."

Central Park was spangled with the golden leaves of late autumn, and the sun shone in a blue sky.

"Hope!" everything whispered. Belinda had just hung up Sister Clement's beautiful little water-color of "Our Lady of Victory." Hope!" the madonna whispered; and again Belinda, facing a new world, laughed. Mrs. Gillflory had thoughtfully hung a white enamelled panel, marked "engagements," beside Belinda's dressing-table. On it Belinda wrote,—"To finish a letter to Amélie, asking her whether she is really to become a nun."

"The first name I have written on my little

white slate is Amélie's," she said to herself, "the very first! That ought to be a good omen!"

At the stroke of four, she entered Mrs. Gill-flory's drawing-room.

"Well, well," said that lady, as she came in herself, just ten minutes afterwards, "I am agreeably surprised. You are actually on time! Everybody keeps me waiting, so I'm always late myself now! We'll get on if you'll only always be punctual. People who keep their engagements exactly always get on!"

A turn in the Park, and then a drive down to the Waldorf-Astoria, where they had tea with two of her aunt's western friends, made the extent of their little tour.

"I suppose, as usual, you can't write a note in French," said Mrs. Gillflory, as they went homeward. "Convent girls don't do anything thoroughly; but I wish you could, for the Vicomtesse De Vrebriand,—she used to be Mary Wilson, of Cleveland, but she's married a Frenchman,—asks me to something in French, and I can't make out what it is. At tea, that odious Mrs. Sampson, who has had a note, too, seemed to understand it, but I don't believe she did."

"You are very hard on the convents, Aunt!"
Belinda spoke very decidedly. "I write French
well because the Sisters insisted on it, and I'll
write your note."

"Oh, indeed, if you're going to contradict me in that way, you'd better declare yourself a friend, such as Claudia is, and not a paid secretary at all!" answered Mrs. Gillflory.

"Very well," said Belinda, flushing. She was silent; then tears of outraged feeling came into her eyes, and her temper rose. "Very well; I will be only a paid companion since you forget that I am a poor relation. I have told you the simple truth. I shall contradict you, Aunt, every time I have to tell you the simple truth when you don't know it. If you want me to do anything else, we had better part at once."

"What? And leave all this luxury?" cried Mrs. Gillflory, in amazement. "When I ask a young person to share all my luxuries, I—" Mrs. Gillflory looked at Belinda's threatening face, and hesitated. "I expect,—I expect, mind,—I expect her to let me say what I please on all occasions."

"I am not like-Claudia," said Belinda; sit-

ting very straight. "I know Claudia, though Arnold was in Paris when I was with the Deresbys. I am not like Claudia."

"I don't say that I'd speak so brusquely to Claudia," said Mrs. Gillflory.

"Why,-she's your niece as well as I."

"But, my dear," answered Mrs. Gillflory, with the air of one teaching a lesson almost too evident, "she's rich;—you can't be expected to be treated as if you were rich."

Two red spots fixed themselves in Belinda's cheeks.

"I know that I am only a distant relative; but Claudia's no nearer, and you asked me to call you aunt;—do you mean that I am presumptuous in doing so, Mrs. Gillflory?" asked Belinda, her eyes flashing. "I suppose I ought not to talk this way,—I'm only a girl, I know; but I tell you that I will be one thing or the other,—either your relative or your paid secretary."

The carriage had stopped before a confectioners.

"Home, John!" Mrs. Gillflower said. Then, turning to Belinda, who still sat very erect, she added, plaintively,—"I intended to buy a pound of marrons glacés, but I won't now; you don't deserve them, for you've taken away my appetite."

No word was spoken until the two reached the elevator.

"I hope you'll dress for dinner," Mrs. Gill-flory said, "Claudia always does."

"I am not Claudia,—please remember," Belinda said, entering her room at once.

Everything in that room was changed. The groups of imitation candles,—which were really gas jets,—on either side of her dressing-table, seemed mockeries to her; and a little while ago she had thought them so pretty. Hope? The chrysanthemums, which had so pleased her as evidences of Mrs. Gillflory's friendliness, seemed to be cold and unkind. Hope? Where was the hope so high in her heart a few hours before?

Had she done wrong? Ought she have remained silent? How easy it had been to be gentle, she thought, at Mrs. Laffan's! She put on her plainest white frock, pulled down her "Pompadour," and smoothed her hair on either side of her brow. She would act as a poor relation should act; but if Claudia Deresby were insolent, she would give the insolence back. As

to Arnold, she would certainly keep him in his place.

Belinda, looking very demure, went into the dining-room and assisted the butler to arrange the flowers, which, to-night, were mignonette and La France roses. The butler thanked her.

"They do need a woman's 'and, Miss," he said. "There ain't no man as flowers take to,—no bloomin' man, Miss. They fix themselves to suit the lydies,—they do!"

Belinda forgot her grievance for a few moments, and perhaps it would not have occurred to her again for some time, had not Claudia, who was just a little older than herself, entered, very superbly dressed in pink silk and chiffon, with a pearl necklace. Claudia kissed her on both cheeks.

"Why, Belinda," she said, "you've positively gone off. Have you been ill? You look so simple and young. You ought to wear a train,—you really ought; I'm not out yet, and I wear a train. Cousin Clarice Gillflory writes from London that long frocks are much the fashion. Have you seen Clarice's letter, Aunt?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Gillflory, looking very

much annoyed, "you showed me my daughter's letter yesterday. I wish she'd write oftener to me. Belinda, what have you been doing to yourself?"

- "Dressing for the part, Mrs. Gillflory?"
 - "Don't Mrs. Gillflory me?"
- "Very well, Aunt."
- "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am a poor relation,—a paid companion,—that's all,—and I have been put in my place. J'y suis, j'y reste. We do learn French at the convents."

"But not—wait Belinda, till I can see you alone!" whispered Mrs. Gillflory, her face white. "Wait! Now go at once and put on your best frock before the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Vrébriand come. I command you!"

"The paid companion obeys!" answered Belinda, with her best courtesy, as she left the room.

Claudia looked at her aunt in amazement.

"Belinda used to be so different," she said.

"Even when we all thought her rich she was just as sweet and easy to get on with. But now!—

and we thought that she was going to turn out to be very pretty. What is the matter?"

"Nothing: only I'm a fool,—a good-hearted fool!" said Mrs. Gillflory, on the verge of tears. "I'm always doing kind-hearted things and suffering for them." Mrs. Gillflory went over to the mirror and fastened a feather on the arm-band of her low-cut mauve gown. "Is my aigrette straight? And don't you think my color is too high? No? I'm all heart. I have allowed that girl to call me 'aunt,' and asked her here, and before she's been here a day she contradicts me, and assumes this air of a persecuted dependent."

"Oh, don't mind!" said Claudia, who was goodnatured when there was no question of rivalry. "She'll be useful. You know I can't do anything,—but she can,"

Claudia looked older than she was. In fact, in her low-cut gown, with its train, she seemed very much of a woman; she was tall; her hair was abundant and auburn, like her brother's; her brown eyes seemed to denote more energy and decision than his; she was very graceful, but artificially graceful. A slight air of discontent in her face, which deepened occasionally, really spoiled it.

Belinda returned, in her best blue organdie and

a little turquoise necklace. Monsieur and Madame de Vrébriand were announced, accompanied by a young nephew of about Belinda's age, and, after Arnold had kept them waiting ten minutes, dinner began.

Belinda suddenly became very shy. A dinner party may be very pleasant to "grown-ups," and yet utterly hateful to young people. She allowed the butler to fill all-her glasses.

"I believe she drinks, as well as smokes corncob pipes," muttered Mrs. Gillflory, wrathfully. "Does she know that a girl not 'out' ought not to have the glasses beside her plate filled?"

This was intended for Claudia's ear; but Belinda heard it.

"Very well," Belinda thought, her face flushing, her shyness all gone. "It is war, then,—well, Mrs. Gillflory, you will be sorry."

Still, she felt that she was out of the convent. Everybody else at the table had so much to talk about. The horse show, the evening operas, the Vicomte's automobile, the Vicomtesse's dance. Belinda sat silent, angry and awkward;—she was only a girl,—only a poor, dependent girl,—and even Claudia was making her feel it. The truth

is, that they were impolite enough not to think of her at all. An episode in Amélie's life,—one that Amélie bitterly regretted, came to her mind. She recalled the story of Amélie's "showing off" at the Watsons'. Very well;—she, the poor, neglected girl would teach these women and that insolent girl a lesson.

René de Vrébriand, pink-cheeked, respectful, a real French boy, sat next to Claudia. He spoke English with difficulty. He had left his college in France for a short tour in America, as he had been ill.

Belinda spoke to him across the table, and asked him how he liked French schools. He was all vivacity at once.

The Vicomte turned his white head, and smiled at Belinda.

"Your French is Parisian, mademoiselle," he said.

"You are very kind, monsieur," answered Belinda, doing her best.

The current changed. The Vicomte, René and the Vicomtesse forgot their good manners, and left Mrs. Gillflory and Claudia to Arnold, who could not keep up with the rapid talk.

"What is it, Mrs. Gillflory?" asked Belinda, innocently, as the guests departed.

"Don't ask me? Don't—I could shake you! Don't 'Mrs. Gillflory' me?"

"Shall I call you 'Mary Ann?'" Belinda asked; then she went to her room.

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XXXIII.

THOSE AWFUL WORDS.

BELINDA sat looking out at the moonlit Park, expecting Mrs. Gillflory to knock and demand an apology. What right had Mrs. Gillflory to be ashamed of her name? "Mary Ann" was not a bad name, and it was absurd for her not to like it; but all Belinda's indignation could not blind her to the truth,—she had been disrespectful and even impertinent. She covered her face with her hands, as she thought of what Sister Clement, Amélie, or Mrs. Laffan,—who regarded her as a paragon,-would say of her conduct. She made no excuse for herself; to-morrow she would apologize—how she hated the thought of that !--pack her trunks and go. Where? Not back to the Laffans, but out into the world, to seek her fortune. What could she do? Belinda sat in the moonlight, summing up her stock of knowledge by which she could earn money.

She could play accurately; but it would take years to make her a good teacher; and she knew that people nowadays insist on a very high standard of piano-playing. She could sing a little. She could read French well and write it fairly. Her speaking vocabulary was small, but for two years French had been the language of the school, —except on feast days,—and she was fluent; her accent, too, was admirable. This was all. No; she could use the typewriter somewhat, and—yes!—she could dance!

She knew that, with the sum of her accomplishments exhibited in the best light, it would not bring sixty dollars a month and board. She was practical enough to see this. While she catalogued her possibilities, she had been absently combing her long hair, and, turning for a moment, she caught sight of her face in the dressing-glass. Her eyes looked hollow in the moonlight; there were dark shades under them, and her hair fell in "mysterious masses," as she said to herself, from her "brow." She would be an actress! She recalled "Le Miracle des Roses" and that her teacher, Mrs. Jacques,—the "ogress" of those wild days,—had not been dissatisfied; and she re-

membered, too, that though Bob Watson had laughed, and called her recitations "The Blood-drinker's Revenge," he had admitted that her "To be or not to Be" was "great." At the convent, she always had the principal part, and her "Esther," in Racine's tragedy, which she had played in a golden crown and a red shawl, royally draped, trimmed with cotton. The cotton was dotted over with little ink spots, to represent the black in ermine fur. Oh, she could go on the stage!

After all, this determination did not still the voice of her conscience. She had been unlady-like,—even impudent,—to Mrs. Gillflory. There was no excuse for it. Only a few days before this, she would not have believed that she could be capable of such conduct;—she was so sure of herself when she came to Mrs. Gillflory.

"I will apologize—and go!" she said, as she rose from her knees, "because I am poor, I suppose I must endure everything."

She nerved herself the next morning, and entered the breakfast-room before anybody else had gone in. Mrs. Gillflory came a few minutes afterwards, to "preside," as she said, "at the urn."

"Only good families keep up the tradition of the urn at breakfast," she said, as she entered, attired in a pale, blue kimona. "The Gillflory coat of arms, quartered with mine, are on the lid. See—What's the matter? You look pale this morning. You talked too much at dinner last night,—entirely too much for so young a girl; to be sure, the Vicomte said that your accent is good, and the Vicomtesse asked me to take you to see her,—but you really ought not have monopolized the conversation. It wasn't bien élevée, you know."

"I know," said Belinda, with her eyes cast down and tears in her voice, "I know,—and I am sorry,—oh, truly sorry,—for what I said. I deserve everything——" Belinda broke down, and could not finish her sentence.

"Why, my child!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory, holding a half-filled cup in the air. "What do you mean? I hope you don't think I'm a wretch! I didn't mean to be so severe. You know I'm accustomed to people who never show feeling. My daughter, Clarice, thought—that it was bad form; Claudia is about the same. I must say I do like people who have heart. I'm all heart."

"But I was so rude, so vulgar, so disrespectful!" said Belinda, raising her tear-filled eyes.

Mrs. Gillflory looked at Belinda in amazement; then she crossed over and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Don't worry. I suppose you were angry because I gently reprimanded you for talking so much and monopolizing the guests;—but, after all, you can't help it, if you speak French so well!"

It was evident that Mrs. Gillflory had missed the direful import of her mocking words. She took heart, with a little prayer of thanksgiving!

"I am not fit for society," she said. "I'm only a girl, and I'm sure to do and say the wrong thing. Oh, just let me stay with you and don't ask me in when you have dinner parties."

"I can't until you have some suitable dinner gowns," Mrs. Gillflory said, thoughtfully. "But you'll do. I am quite pleased that you have so much feeling. I'll take you to the dressmaker's to-day—this very morning. There are some notes to write. You'll find them on my desk. Don't forget to spell Miss Granger's name "Mae" in

acknowledging the flowers. She'll never speak to me, if you don't. And remind the 'Social Register' people that they have spelt my name with one 'l.' If you want to know anything else, you'll find me in the drawing-room. Claudia takes her breakfast in bed, and Arnold does not get up until ten o'clock. He is a genius, you know. Good-bye. Richards," to the butler, "bring me the newspapers!"

XXXIV.

MRS. GOLDSTROM.

Belinda found Mrs. Gillflory's desk in great confusion; but she found at last at least a dozen notes and letters which needed to be answered. Mrs Gillflory had sketched the kind of answer she wanted on the margin of each; there was a luxury of stationery. There were white, mauve, heliotrope, pale yellow, monogramed, crested and one-lettered sheets of all sizes. Belinda, following her own taste, chose some heavy white paper, and did her best to write appropriate answers, including the French note to Madame Vrébriand. This last gave her some trouble, as she could not find a French dictionary, and she guessed that Mrs. Gillflory, deep in her newspapers, did not want to be disturbed.

When she had finished the work and had begun to set Mrs. Gillflory's desk to rights, Arnold lounged in.

"Glad to see you," he said yawning. "I got up early this morning just to have a talk with you."

"Thank you," Belinda said, not liking his manner at all; he might be a genius, but if geniuses yawned in your face, she hoped that she might not meet another genius!

"Good morning," she said, coolly.

"The old girl's in the drawing-room, I suppose. I hate these beastly flats,—there's no room for anybody. You've grown, Claudia tells me, since she saw you last."

Belinda seemed busily engaged in sorting the sticks of ceiling wax. She finished making a list of what the desk contained, and was about to shut down the lid when an oblong piece of blue paper fell to the floor. It was a cheque made out by Mrs. Gillflory to her florist. Belinda had forgotten to inclose it; luckily, she had not sealed the note, so that it was easy to remedy the mistake.

"So the old girl will let you handle cheques, too? Good, old girl!" said Arnold. "I wish she'd trust me so far."

Belinda was silent.

Arnold rolled a cigarette, and began to smoke.

"I must ask you not to do that," she said quietly. "My aunt would not like it."

"The old girl lets me do as I please," said Arnold, in an injured tone. "Good, old girl!"

"I am not a good old girl! And I'd be obliged if you'd speak of Mrs. Gillflory properly in my presence," said Belinda, her head high in the air.

Arnold took his cigarette from his mouth.

"Nobody talks that way to me," he said, plaintively. "It disturbs me. I was just about to play for you a little fantasia I composed this morning."

"It's too early for music," answered Belinda.

"If you haven't had your breakfast——"

"Oh, I take merely some coffee in the morning, after the European fashion. American ways are great bores, don't you know."

"You've been so long abroad!" said Belinda smiling.

"Don't quote that to Mrs. Gillflory, or there'll be a row. You know there's an old play, 'The Mighty Dollar,' and there's a Mrs. Gillflory in it, who is always saying, 'I've been so long abroad!' My aunt will be down on you if you quote that. I think I'll tell her!"

"Do 'geniuses' always tell things?" asked Belinda innocently.

Arnold colored.

"What do you mean? People do call me a genius, but that's no reason why——"

"People are wrong," said Belinda, decidedly.

"A man can't be a genius unless he works. People think,—that is, people who don't know,—that I speak French well I don't. I never use the subjunctive mood, but I am going to work hard until I do speak it well," added Belinda, decidedly.

"But people of genius don't have to work," said Arnold, piqued. "This little fantasia came into my head this morning. I intend to call it 'Tears in the Snow.' Let me whistle it."

Belinda put on an air of resignation, and Arnold whistled very softly.

- "Isn't it convincing?" he asked triumphantly.
- " I suppose you want me to tell you the truth?"
- "Artists always want to know the truth," he answered, smiling. He was ready to hear the usual compliments.
- "Well," Belinda said, "I can't say what it would be if it were harmonized; but it opened like Schubert's 'Serenade,' took a dip into Men-

delssohn's 'Consolation' and ended like Sousa's 'Jack Tar.'"

Arnold rose, red and angry.

"It's not true," he said.

Belinda locked the desk.

"Artists," she said, "like the truth. I suppose that, if I were a young lady, and you a young gentleman, I'd leave the room after that speech; but, as you're only a boy, I'll take no offence,—boys, I suppose, often talk that way,—and show you that I am telling you the truth." She pursed up her lips. "I can whistle, too. Now,—here goes your fantasia!"

Arnold, frowning listened; his frown deepened, as he recognized that Belinda had actually caught the fantasia.

"Now," she said, "listen to the first ten bars. Schubert's repetitions, you must see that. Now, we change. La!—la!—la! I whistle again. Mendelsohn's 'Consolation!' Now!—march time! Susa!"

"I am ashamed of you, Belinda Murray!" said Mrs. Gillflory, who had lifted the portière. "I am ashamed! Arnold, I wonder that you would encourage a girl to whistle."

"I didn't encourage her," muttered Arnold, sulkily. "She's no special friend of mine. She's been saying the rudest things about me."

"Geniuses tell, no doubt," said Belinda. "Gentlemen don't. I am glad I know only one genius."

Arnold flung himself out of the room.

"What does this mean?" asked Mrs. Gillflory, mollified by the sight of the little pile of notes.

"Oh, among other things, Cousin Arnold wanted to smoke, and I wouldn't let him."

"You mustn't be so rigid. If a man wants to smoke—"

"He ought to ask permission."

Mrs. Gillflory laughed.

"You are a spitfire. I'm half afraid of you. If you want to try over a musical piece with Arnold, go in to the piano. Don't whistle,—only tomboys and girls that have to earn their living in that way whistle. I'm glad you gave Arnold a lesson. His people spoil him because they think that he's a genius. I'm sure I don't know whether he is or not,—but he likes to have his own way. The notes are ready?"

"I've sealed only two,—the purely business letters," said Belinda, anxiously.

"You have used the plain white paper, with the single gold letter," said Mrs. Gillflory, a trifle disappointed.

"Yes; I knew that you did not want to use a crest. Women have no right to use a crest."

"Where did you learn that?" asked Mrs. Gill-flory, much amused.

"In one of uncle's books on Heraldry," said Belinda.

"I'm glad to know that," Mrs. Gillflory said, chuckling. "I'll swoop down on a lot of people who use crests continually. They're too common anyhow, here in New York.—Yes, these notes are well-expressed. You're a jewel, my dear. Now, we'll go to to the dressmaker's."

Belinda, pleased with herself, went off to get her hat. Mrs. Gillflory decided, after much discussion, to go down in the street car. It was too early for her horses, and somebody had told her that cabs were full of scarlet fever germs.

She looked at Belinda approvingly.

"You are straight and you walk well. I was very like you at your age;—don't forget to call me aunt."

Belinda, accustomed so long to the country,

was amused by the persons of such various types in the car. At the same time, she was frightened by the manner of the progress down Broadway. At every second moment, seemingly, their car was threatened by a big van or some loaded vehicle.

"It's bad enough," Mrs. Gillflory said, composedly, "but it's not nearly so bad as driving. You don't know when an automobile is going to rush into your carriage. If one goes into the street of New York, one takes one's life in her hands. Do you like the city better than the country?"

"I feel a little homesick for the country; but I like the city to work in. Of course, if I did not have to work, I should prefer the country."

A stout, good-natured, elderly Jewess, wearing a brown wig on which was perched a marvellously large black hat, sat opposite Belinda. She held a large basket on her knees, which occasionally called for her attention, especially when a fellow-traveller, going in or out, came in contact with it; her eyes were fixed on Belinda, as she entered the car with her aunt. A bewildered look came over her face, and then her lips parted in a joyous smile.

After a time Belinda caught her eye.

"Oh," she said, smiling, "it must be,—it is—Mrs. Goldstrom."

"Ach, yes," said Mrs. Goldstrom, her face beaming. "You did not speak;—I know now that you are not mad with me, but have kind feelings. Yes! I am so glad to see such a nice young lady,—so learned and clever. Ach, this is gemüthlick!" Belinda forgot her aunt and the passengers.

"How is everybody?" she asked.

"Ach, that is well. You are so kind. My Rachel is married; she married rich," said Mrs. Goldstrom, with pride, raising her voice. "Rosy Fingelstein's papa is dead, and he left Rosy the horse and wagon; she is stuck-up, like a fat pig. Essie Weidmeist is married, but not so rich than my Rachel,—her husband catches rats for all the big warehouses down town;—Becky Lilienblum was so mad with my Rachel when she married that she could have scratched her eyes oud,—Becky has a bad disposition; but we cannot all marry rich. Isaac Fingelstein,—Rosy's brother,—often speaks of you. He is rich,—so rich as I cannot say, and he often speaks of the fine little lady. Ach, I have so much to tell."

She paused a moment to extricate the lid of her basket from the fringe of a passing shawl.

"May I ask," whispered Mrs. Gillflory, icily gazing at Mrs. Goldstrom, as if that cheerful person were a boa constrictor, "who your charming friend is?"

"Oh, dear Mrs. Goldstrom," said Belinda, her eyes shining. "She is a dear. I used to know her when grandmamma was here."

"I must say," began Mrs. Gillflory; but Mrs. Goldstrom interrupted her.

"My son is on the stage; I will send you a ticket. He does jig dances lofely. And I will send tickets to your beautiful sister, who is with you," said Mrs. Goldstrom, gazing admiringly at Mrs. Gillflory's rosy cheeks as seen through her veil. "And maybe you will bring your beautiful sister to come to see me. Iky will be pleased; he is a good boy and he earns good money. Ach, I must go; I could talk all day!"

Mrs. Goldstrom, smiling and talking volubly, finally descended from the car.

"I must say, Belinda, that you have queer friends;—if that is a specimen. Do I really look so young? There was something really interesting about that old woman, though she is a trifle vulgar."

Belinda was amazed.

"Did you really believe her, Aunt?"

Mrs. Gillflory looked at Belinda as if she would have liked to shake her; but the car had reached Canal street; it was time to get off.

XXXV.

AN OFFERING OF FRIENDSHIP.

BELINDA enjoyed the first half-hour of her visit to the dressmaker's. It was a pleasure to look at pretty things to wear; but as the hours wore on, and she found herself treated as a mere block by Mrs. Gillflory and the dressmaker, she wished that she were back again with her cousins, the Laffans.

"I'm just like a tailor's block," she said, as the dressmaker, with her mouth full of pins, pulled her about, "Oh, dear, Aunt, it's very tiresome!"

"You'll have to stand a good deal of tiresomeness if you want to look well," said the French dressmaker, pleasantly, "Il faut souffrir d'être belle."

"Then I'll never be 'belle.' Shall I never sit down again?"

Her pinching and basting went on for another

hour, and then the modiste declared herself partially content.

"On Wednesday I shall again expect mademoiselle," she said.

Belinda made a face.

"Stop that, my dear," said Mrs. Gillflory, severely, "you will give yourself wrinkles!"

What a strange world this is, Belinda thought, where you are expected to think of yourself all the time and you can never say what you think!

"We must look at hats now," Mrs. Gillflory said. "We'll get to Fifth Avenue as soon as possible, so as to have plenty of time before luncheon."

Belinda groaned in spirit.

The Fifth Avenue establishment was on the ground floor of a house that had once been very fashionable. A number of Mrs. Gillflory's acquaintances were there. The matter of Belinda's three hats was soon arranged; that of Mrs. Gillflory's took more time. While Belinda was waiting rather disconsolately,—and, it must be confessed, with some hope of an early luncheon,—Inez Foster came in. Belinda did not know her at first; she seemed very much older,—an elderly

young woman, in fact,—and her long silk coat, ornamented with all sorts of insertion, and very pronounced hat helped to disguise her.

"Why, little Belinda!" she said, effusively. "Dear me! how you have grown! You've come to live with Mrs. Gillflory. You are in luck! She's tremendously rich, and she spends her money. I wish she'd taken me up; you don't know how hard it is for a poor girl like me to keep up; people dress so extravagantly now. I suppose you've been buying hats."

"Mrs. Gillflory has just bought three for me," Belinda said, indifferently. "Why three, I don't know."

"Three hats at a time!" Inez gave a little shriek, "three hats at a time from Madame Claire! You are in luck! It takes nearly all my allowance to get one. If I bought two I'd have to clean my gloves for ten years! How is Amélie Watson."

- "Very well. She is in France still?"
- "And those other dreadful Watsons that lived on Capitol Hill? I forget—"
 - "You forget that they are my cousins."
 - "Oh," said Inez, laughing, "you may abuse

my cousins as much as you like, to make things even. I'd like to wring some of their necks,—the're so rich and stingy. If they give a girl a golf outfit, they think they've done their whole duty. Good-bye. I'll take you to a matinée some day when I'm flush. If Mrs. Gillflory's giving any particularly nice dinners, see that I get a card. Mother never goes out, you know; she needn't ask her."

Inez disappeared behind the draperies which veiled the most sacred part of the shop, and Belinda was left to think about her. She recalled the Rosses. What a life to lead !-- a life made up of dresses and parties; --- a life made up of desires to get somewhere because other persons were there,—a life of idle amusement which did not amuse, in which there could be no room for God. Belinda, as we know, was not a particularly serious young girl; but she was clear-sighted, and, like Amélie, she was trying to make religion a part of her life. She reflected that her life would not be very quiet among all these fashionable people. It was pleasant, though, to have such very pretty things, and she was watching the milliner put a bunch of grapes on the flat hat of

green leaves intended for her when Inez came back again, discontent plainly marked on her face.

"There isn't a decent thing I can buy," she said, "and I must pay cash, for mother will not let me run up bills. I've got twenty dollars, but Claire hasn't a rag under thirty. I must have something distinguished, you know."

"Thirty!" gasped Belinda, "for a hat! Why, this one I have on cost one dollar and a half, and I trimmed it myself."

"It looks it, my dear," said Inez, coldly. "I should have said seventy-five cents, and that you had it trimmed in Division street. Why, that green bit over there, which your aunt is having made for you after the latest Paris model will not cost a cent under thirty, and it's very simple. I don't know what I'm to do with my poor twenty dollars."

Belinda looked into the long mirror.

"Really, Inez," she said, indignantly, "you might be more polite. What's the matter with my hat?"

"Everything," said Inez. "You needn't mind. You'll have hats and gowns galore in a few weeks,

and I think you'll wear them better than that Claudia Deresby. Oh, I know she is your cousin!—but, if you will have a lot of disagreeable cousins you must expect to have them abused. Since Clarice has gone abroad,—she was sent, my dear, because she wanted to marry a poor Navy officer——"

"Sent!" cried Belinda, "I'd think a Navy officer ought to be good enough for any lady. I'm almost a Navy girl myself. Frederick, my brother, is at Annapolis."

"Oh! I hope he is nicer than your cousins,—or at least as nice as you. But a girl like Clarice Gillflory can't afford to marry a poor Naval officer;—so they've sent her abroad. Since she's been away, Mrs. Gillflory can't get along without young people in her house. I wish she'd take me in, I really envy you." Inez was about to go when Mrs. Gillflory called her.

"There'll be some people in for bridge whist to-night," Mrs. Gillflory said. "You'd better come about nine, Inez. I'll send a maid for you in a cab. How's your mother?"

"Not much better. Thank you, Mrs. Gill-flory. I'll make this twenty a hundred to-night,"

she whispered to Belinda, who did not in the least understand.

Mrs. Gillflory declared that she was very hungry, and, in spite of her prejudice against hansoms, called one, and whirled Belinda to a restaurant, where luncheon to suit her was served. There were many ladies there. Some of them knew Mrs. Gillflory, and declared that they were tired to death, and that New York was the most wearisome place in the world, and they wondered why they lived there! Belinda wondered, too, and, when she was eating a peach ice in a long glass, she asked Mrs. Gillflory if all these ladies were really tired of New York.

"Of course not," said Mrs. Gillflory. "If they go anywhere else they are wretched till they get back. I think that New York is the *dearest* place, though I like Chicago, too."

Mrs. Gillflory had several other engagements, and Belinda was sent home in the cab. There was nobody to greet her, and she felt very lonely as she entered her room, flooded with afternoon sunshine. However, she found a picture card, dated Lourdes, from Amélie, and a note from Fred, saying that he was well and had been pro-

moted. She felt more cheerful after this. A little later, the butler told her that there was a large box, sent by express, for her in the hall, prepaid.—The butler smiled and said he thought it was for her, but that, if it wasn't, or she didn't want it, it could be sent back.

"It's a dog, miss," he said, "and, if it is a big dog, Mrs. Gillflory will send it away, anyhow."

"Oh, do let me see it!" Belinda ran out into the hall, to meet a countryman standing over a box. He was attended by two hall-boys, decorated with silver buttons to the throat.

The countryman tipped his hat.

"The Laffan boys sent this by me," he said; "they told me the express company wouldn't take it. It's a dog."

The box had been bored full of holes, and Belinda, as she examined it, caught sight of a pair of eyes and a mouse-colored coat.

"Oh, do open it!" she asked.

The hall-boys, full of curiosity, went to work at once. The lid was lifted off, and out stepped Morfido! A large strip of white paper was pasted inside the lid of the box, and Belinda read, in Fred's best print, "He was lonesome."

Belinda hugged Morfido, who seemed pleased.

"The ugliest dog I've ever seen," said one of the hall-boys. "A Japanese, by cracky!"

"He is just like a sausage on four sticks," said the other, grinning.

"Like a sweet potato, with four skivers in him," laughed the countryman. "I never seed his like before!"

"He's a bloomin' ugly cur, miss," said the butler, grinning. "And I'm afraid the mistress will make short work of him when she comes. She has no use for dawgs unless they are King Charles. I'd sent it back, miss, if I may be allowed to suggest, miss."

"I can't send it back," said Belinda, in distress.
"Two of the best friends I have in the world sent it,—two kind little boys. It is the most valuable thing they have, and they thought I'd be lonely without Morfido."

"Without what?" asked one of the hall-boys, interested. "Say that again, miss."

" Morfido."

"Rum name," said the butler.

Morfido stretched his legs, looked about, and nestled close to Belinda.

"I'd like to have him. How much do you want for him?" asked the second hall-boy, who grinned every time he looked at Morfido.

"I couldn't sell him," answered Belinda.

"He's a gift; but," she said, brightening, "if my aunt will not let me keep him, perhaps you'll take care of him for awhile."

"Done!" said the hall-boy.

The countryman declared that the boys had paid him, and took his leave. Morfido was taken off to the kitchen, to be fed. Belinda heard peals of laughter coming from that region, and she guessed that friendship's offering was exciting amusement. However, as Morfido's good opinion of himself was well grounded, and the boys would never know, she was not deeply concerned.

The butler asked her respectfully about arranging the flowers,—which had just arrived,—for dinner. She found herself pleasantly occupied until her aunt arrived.

Mrs. Gillflory approved of the floral arrangements and looked over her letters.

"Belinda," she said, "I'm pleased with you. You don't want to be told to do things. Most persons do. Nothing is ever done until one tells them to do it. They run, and——"

Mrs. Gillflory paused, uttered a shriek, and jumped upon one of the dining-room chairs.

"Run, Belinda, run! Call the police! Turn the horrible monster out!" she screamed.

"It's only Morfido, Aunt," said Belinda, seizing the dog, which had quietly taken advantage of an opportunity to explore.

"Only—what? Take the horror away," cried Mrs. Gillflory.

Morfido was not pretty, it is true, but Belinda was indignant at these insults. Mrs. Gillflory would not descend to earth until he was taken away by the butler.

"I'll have the vile thing killed to-morrow," she said, "present or no present!"

XXXVI.

BELINDA AND INEZ.

MRS. GILLFLORY was astonished when she found that Belinda did not play "bridge." She thought that everybody played "bridge," but what could be expected from a girl brought up in the Western woods under her brother's old-fashioned system.

"You'll have to learn, Belinda, or you'll be out of everything; but you must not, with your income, play high."

"You don't mean that you play for money, Aunt!" cried Belinda, shocked.

"You are certainly a convent girl,—you really make me lose patience! For what else should we play? You are certainly a country mouse. There are girls no older than you in society who make all their pin money at bridge."

Belinda was aghast.

"It doesn't seem respectable, Aunt; I would never play for money."

"Oh, nonsense. You can go to your room after dinner; I don't want you to appear much until you are better dressed;—so this evening you can do as you please. Everybody,—that is, all my servants,—will be occupied, or I should send a maid to the theatre with you. But I can ring for a messenger boy; he'll take you and bring you back."

Belinda was tempted by the prospect of the theatre.

"I'd like to see something of Shakspere's."

"You'll have to wait, then. I see that your taste is somewhat behind the times; but it's good. I'm fond of Shakspere myself in moderation. Well, do as you please."

At dinner, Arnold was rather sulky; he glared at Belinda several times with unconcealed disapproval.

"Herr Schickel, the piano virtuoso, heard me play at the Conservatory. He said that he was much impressed."

Mrs. Gillflory said,—

"Indeed?"

And Claudia added,-

" How nice!"

Belinda was silent.

- "I gave him a theme for a rhapsodie Américaine, founded on negro melodies."
- "How generous!" Mrs. Gillflory said; "but you ought not to give your ideas away,--you ought to keep them for the future."
- "I'm not afraid of the future," said Arnold. "I shall never want musical ideas."
- "You have a great future, Arnold, I'm sure," said Claudia, "and papa is willing to spend any amount of money on it. Papa will do anything for Arnold;—I wish I were a genius."

Arnold cast a triumphant glance at Belinda.

- "Do you play?" asked Claudia, turning to Belinda.
 - "A little."
- "Convent girls always play a little," said Arnold with a sneer.
- "Convent girls," retorted Belinda, "do not borrow other people's musical ideas. They don't attempt more than they can do."
- "Indeed!" said Claudia, her eyes flashing, "I am glad to hear it;—but what do you mean?"

"Just what I say," answered Belinda; and then she was struck with compunction. "Oh, Aunt!" she said, "I hope you don't think I am rude, do you?"

"Not at all," said Mrs. Gillflory, calmly. "I think that Arnold was rude. You have a right to defend your schools. I would not have much respect for you if you didn't take the right. If Arnold is a genius, he ought to act like a gentleman."

"But there is an insinuation in what Belinda said." Claudia was always willing to take sides with her brother against an alien, no matter how much she might differ from him. "There is! She means to say that all Arnold's music is not original."

"I mean that Arnold should wait until he is older,—his business ought to be to learn the theory of music well, and to practise continually."

Arnold laughed.

"Thank you!" he said, "you know, of course."

"I believe that it is good advice," said Mrs. Gillflory, "and I must say that Arnold's last two-step was amazingly like 'General Grant's Grand

March,' which I used to play when I was a girl."

Belinda left the table feeling very uncomfortable. She could not live in this atmosphere of bickering and contention. And yet she must be in some way to blame. Perhaps it would be well for her to be quiet, except when she had pleasant things to say;—but she must defend herself sometimes. She found relief by going to the kitchen to see Morfido. He had already made a place for himself with the servants, who found his airs of proprietorship very amusing. The cook, who usually objected to dogs, had been attracted by some of Morfido's winning ways, and when Belinda entered, she begged her to find some way of inducing Mrs. Gillflory to keep this ugly but fascinating animal.

"Sure, I'll let him sleep on the rug by the kitchen fire all night; and, if the poor dear wants anything the butler can get it for him." The cook and the maids slept in another part of the apartment house; the butler had a room near the kitchen. The butler roared with laughter at the suggestion; but the cook, who had taken a fancy to Morfido, insisted, in spite of the message that

was brought to her from Mrs. Gillflory, just after dinner,—" I want that beast turned out the first thing in the morning."

Belinda was further depressed by this message, but she resolved to dress Morfido in cherry-colored ribbons,—gifts from Marguerite,—in time for breakfast. Morfido, with cherry-colored bows, had been considered irresistible at the Laffans'; and, as she had discovered that Mrs. Gillflory was in a good humor in the morning, she determined to try the effect of Morfido in all his splendor.

She could hear voices in the drawing-room, and she knew that the game of "bridge" was progressing. She lost herself in a volume of history. There was a chapter on the captivity of the family of Louis XVI. in the Temple, and she read it with interest and horror. The story of the devotion and courage of the little French princess,—the daughter of Marie Antoinette,—told with such simplicity by the young girl herself, made her forget everything. She could see the royal family in the gloomy temple, which had been the residence of the King's brother. She could see Louis XVI., the Queen, the princess Elizabeth, the princess Royal, and the little Louis, at dinner.

She could hear the terrible cries of the mob outside, who were carrying the golden-haired head of Madame de Lamballe on a pike, to show it to the Queen. She saw the honest guard close the doors and pull down the shades of the windows for fear that the Queen should behold the heart-rending sight. And then, when the Queen knew the truth,—that this dear friend, who had come back to Paris for her had been so barbarously murdered,—she could only stand, unconscious, unseeing, wrapt in horror as in a cloak.

Belinda read on. After the King and the Queen and her holy aunt, the Princess Elizabeth, had been sent to the guillotine, and her little brother lay dying in the room below her, where she could hear his cries, but not see him, came the men, better intentioned, to improve the condition of her cheerless room. One of them tried a piano that was there. "Isn't it out of tune?" "I do not know," the princess said; "it was the Queen's, I will never touch it again."

Tears filled Belinda's eyes. Reading this narrative, she felt strong and brave. To suffer nobly!—that was the best thing in the world! She was impatient when a knock sounded at the door, for she had turned back to the first chapters in the book. They gave an account of the frivolity, the sinfulness, the cynicism of some of those French nobles who died so gracefully when the Red Terror wrought retribution upon them.

"Come in!" she said, not too graciously.

Inez Fawcett entered. She closed the door after her.

"I have just come to brush my hair a little before I go home."

Belinda was struck by a strange note in her voice.

"Oh, I'm wretched!—and I look it!" she exclaimed, turning from the mirror.

Belinda rose, and put her arm about Inez.

- "Tell me!"
- "I can't."
- "It may help you!"
- "No," said Inez,—her face was pale,—"No; you wouldn't understand; you'd despise me. It's no use. I've just broken down because I couldn't help. I wish I had some money; I don't want them to see that I feel so bad about what is a trifle to them."

- "I would help you if I could."
- "Nonsense!" said Inez, fiercely. "If you could, you wouldn't. But, as you can't, there is no use in talking about it."
- "Well, dry your eyes, Inez;—here's lavender water—"
- "I wish I were rich,—I hate to be poor; if I had a little money, I would not be the wretchedest girl in New York to-night!"
- "I am poor, Inez, but I don't intend to be unhappy."
- "Oh, you've a rich aunt, and you're not in society. You don't have to pay debts of honor."
 - "All debts are debts of honor, are they not?"
- "You're a little fool!" said Inez, stamping her foot. "You can put off other debts, but, if you lose at cards, you must pay at once."
 - "Lose at cards?" cried Belinda, aghast.
- "Yes,—lose at cards, idiot! I've just lost one hundred and twenty dollars, and I had to pay it,—twenty dollars of my own, and a hundred my mother gave me to pay the rent!"
- "Oh, Inez! Inez!" exclaimed Belinda.
 "How could you?"
- "I knew that's what you would say? How

couldn't I?—rather! The money is gone;—mother will not have another cent in the world for a month. We keep up appearances, but, since father died, we haven't a penny to spare. I'll drown myself! I just thought I'd risk the twenty dollars of my own, and perhaps make a hundred,—Sara Griffiths often makes that much in an evening,—she did to-night,—but I lost and lost and lost! and here I am, ruined! I don't see why I tell you, Belinda, except that you are so honest, and I believe you'd help me if you could."

"I can," said Belinda, "and I will! I've a cheque for a hundred dollars,—Mr. Laffan gave it to me,—for myself,—to do as I please with, and——"

[&]quot;You'll lend it to me," said Inez, joyously.

[&]quot;With pleasure."

[&]quot;It reads' to bearer," said Inez, examining the piece of paper which Belinda took from her mahogany box. "I'll pay you as soon as I can; but you may need it?"

[&]quot;Oh, no!"

[&]quot;I'm happy!" Inez kissed Belinda rapturously, and the color came back to her cheeks. "I'll go in and face them now. Oh, Belinda, you have

saved me!—but promise that you will not tell your aunt."

"Of course not," said Belinda, indignantly.

"It's a matter of honor."

"You're a brick!" cried Inez, embracing her again. "To be sure, I've lost twenty dollars, and I'll have to make an old hat over again,—but there may be a turn in luck. I don't see why I shouldn't be as lucky for once as Sara Griffiths. I'll try, anyhow."

"Surely," said Belinda, "you will not play again?"

"How little you know what girls in society have to do, Belinda, you innocent little thing. I shouldn't be anything in our set if I didn't play 'bridge'"

"Inez, I should not have given you that money if I thought you did not intend to give it to your mother!"

"You bloomin' idiot!" laughed Inez, "I'll stay and make it a cool two hundred before midnight. Of course, I'll pay you at once."

"No, no!" called Belinda, but Inez had gone.

XXXVII.

THE BURGLAR.

BELINDA was shocked, as well she might be. That a young girl should shamelessly lose or win money in a friend's house struck her as "awful,"—not in the sense in which awful is generally used,—but in the real meaning of the word. She heard the voices in the drawing-room raised again,—Inez was making her adieux,—and she went back to her book, relieved.

She had acquired in the convent a taste for what is called "serious" reading. Sister Clement had permitted a certain number of novels, but she had shown her pupils that it was, in most cases, better to read the sources of the historical novel rather than the novel itself, and she had encouraged her girls to read and comment on questions of history, and to choose an epoch in which to make researches. Belinda had become interested in the French Revolution, and from the French Revo-

lution, she had read herself back to the American Revolution. Of late she had become interested in "sources,"—that is, in the documents on which histories are founded. And Belinda had been led into this so gently that she was not aware that she was working at all. Her interest in "sources" had been much increased since she had learned French so that she could read it well. She was making careful notes of the "sources" mentioned in the history she was reading. She stopped suddenly when she had written in her book "Mémoirs sur la Vie de Marie Antoinette par Madame Campan." She realized that she could not hope to buy this book or any other, since her money was gone. It occurred to her for the first time, with real force, that the pleasure of being generous must always be paid for by somebody.

"If my hundred dollars help Inez to pay her mother's rent, I don't mind; but, if the money temps her to gamble, I do mind it very much," she thought.

Poor Marie Antoinette!—when she had the hands of the clock turned forward, so that she and her agreeable friends might play for high

stakes when the King had gone, little did she dream of the evil she was working by her example! And with what rage the people, who had suffered for years through the luxury of courts, turned on the beautiful Countess, Jules de Polignac, who was so gay and light-hearted, and drove her from France. If people become luxurious and forget to show good example, retribution must follow. If people would only read history! Belinda reflected.

Shortly after midnight she was awakened by fierce barks and squeals coming from somewhere in the rear of the apartment. Then she heard men's voices and the sound of a pistol; there was a great hubbub; she bolted the door, and, though much frightened, she thought with a vague satisfaction that history had prepared her to meet an uprising of the New York populace with a certain calmness. It was evident that her aunt had locked herself in, too;—for her voice could be heard in an excited talk with the butler. The populace did not appear, however. Belinda dragged her washstand from the door, removed the long rain coat, in which she had expected to meet the revolutionists, and went to bed.

In the morning the little breakfast-room looked as bright as usual. Tall lilies bowed from the vase in the middle of the table; the urn looked as comfortable as usual, and the coffee smelt equally comfortable.

Mrs. Gillflory was already seated, holding Morfido in her arms; grouped about her were Claudia, Arnold, the cook, the maids and the butler.

"Dear, sweet, precious one!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory, "he saved all our lives,—dear, itty, tootsie wootsie!"

Though very much puzzled, Belinda could not help thinking that Aloysius and Fred would have been insulted by such "baby" talk directed to the manly and knowing Morfido.

"'Ittle, tweetie, tootsie wootsie!" Mrs. Gillflory continued, and Morfido, seeing an old friend, leaped across the table into the arms of Belinda.

"Wait!" Belinda said.

She took Morfido into her room, delighted with the impression he had made. In a short time Morfido had an enormous bow of cherry-colored ribbon about his neck; his legs were ornamented with smaller bows, and a still smaller one almost concealed his tail. Mrs. Gillflory was entranced. He would be a new sensation; she would take him out for a drive every day, and change the color of the ribbons.

"A pale pink would suit him beautifully; he has such a lovely complexion!" said Mrs. Gill-flory.

Arnold burst out laughing. He caught Belinda's eye, and she was compelled to laugh, too. After all, Arnold must have some good qualities, she thought, since he and she could laugh at the same thing.

"You may laugh," said Mrs. Gillflory, severely, but if the burglar hadn't trodden on Morfido,—dear, 'ittle precious!—and Morfido had not had the sense to squeal, we should all be murdered in our beds!"

"I ain't sure that it were a burglar man, or honly a man that 'ad 'ad too much,—I wouldn't swear to it; but 'e was a nawsty customer,—I'll say that; and, when I 'ear the little dawg squeal, I whipped out my revolver and let it drive. 'E 'owled and dropped down on the kitchen lift;—that's hall I know!"

"Did you shoot him?" asked Claudia, horrorstricken. "I hope you didn't." "I fawncy not," the butler said, "I missed."

"It's over now. You must be sure to lock the doors of the lifts;—he came up on one of them evidently," said Mrs. Gillflory.

Belinda noticed that Claudia was very pale, and that she passed a note from her hand into the pocket of the little lace apron she wore. The breakfast was quite gay; Morfido behaved with good propriety, and Mrs. Gillflory was in great good humor over her new toy. Arnold and Belinda avoided all musical subjects; but Claudia was unusually quiet and preoccupied.

Belinda found her work "cut out" for her this morning. Mrs. Gillflory required a long and complicated letter to be written in French to her dressmaker in the Rue de la Paix, Paris. Then she was expected to compose twelve pretty notes, —each unlike the other,—for an "informal" dinner two weeks ahead. After that, she was to balance Mrs. Gillflory's household books for a month past, and then go to the florist and choose decorations for an "informal" tea a week hence.

Belinda was rather nervous when she had finished the important letter for the Rue de la Paix.

"If I knew French well," said Mrs. Gillflory, impatiently, "I should never look in a dictionary."

Belinda closed her mouth tightly.

When the letter, with all its details, was done, Mrs. Gillflory declared that she must go to the shops,—Belinda would have to write the notes on her own responsibility.

"Mrs. Paul Thornton is literary. Make some literary allusion in her note,—say something about poetry,—any old poetry will do. Old General Erwin likes to be considered a handsome man,—say,—of course, these notes are all to be written in my name,—that he was the best-looking man at Mrs. Myles' concert the other night. As for the rest, a line or two of general prettiness will do."

"I'm afraid that I can't, Aunt. Claudia-"

"Claudia is not paid for this sort of thing," said Mrs. Gillflory, severely. "If Claudia was clever and needed money, I wouldn't have you."

"Oh, very well," said Belinda, trying to be as calm and stately as Marie Antoinette on the way to execution. "Anything more?"

"No, that's enough, if it's well done. Goodbye." "I am the most unhappy girl in the world," thought Belinda, beginning to cry after Mrs. Gillflory had gone. "It's the hardest thing in the world to be ordered about! Dictionary! If she'd look into a dictionary oftener, she would not use so much slang. I wish I did not have to earn my own living!"

Indignant, red-eyed, Belinda ploughed into the work of composing the notes. After awhile, the exercise amused her.

"Here's 'Miss Mae Cresson,'—'fond of roses,'"
Mrs. Gillflory has written under her name. I'll
do it this way, I think.

"'MY DEAR MISS CRESSON:—I am to have a few friends at dinner, on the twentieth, and I particularly want you. You will find your favorite roses on the table, and a great bunch for yourself. Do not fail me. Yours, affectionately, Henriette Gillflory.' It does not seem long enough; but they are all to be short, I believe; —'Henriette,'—yes, my aunt signs 'Henriette' now; she has written it plainly."

It was nearly luncheon time when Belinda had completed her tasks. She was tired and hungry; she was preparing to take Morfido out for a run,

when Claudia came into the room. Claudia was dressed for walking, and Belinda could not help admiring her.

"I look well, you think," Claudia said; "I see in your eyes that you think so;—I am wearing the tailor-made suit my aunt gave me, done by Redfern, and the plumes in my hat——"

"They're lovely. They're almost as beautiful as the famous heron plume that the Duc de Lauzun gave to the Queen of France."

"I never read about it," said Claudia, indifferently. "Don't you envy all this splendor?"

"Before I came here, especially when I read about 'society' in the papers, I used to think that girls like you were much to be envied; but, since I'm here,—but, after all, Claudia, it's hard for a girl to work for her living. You don't know how hard it is, and I've only begun to see it myself. If I wasn't a Catholic, I couldn't stand it. Now, this morning I was tempted to be angry with my aunt."

"She is stupid," said Claudia, "but goodnatured when things please her. There are some things she will not do," she added with a sigh. "I'd give up all this luxury, if I could earn my own living, and be independent."

"One can never be independent in this world," said Belinda, with an answering sigh. "I know that."

"You are more independent than I am. What can I do? I have been brought up for society; I am given beautiful things,—yes; I have an allowance, for every cent of which I must account; I am permitted to lose a little money on bridge; but not much. I must buy gloves and ribbons out of my allowance, and I must have new things continually. I must,—that's all. If I try to make things for myself, people find it out and laugh."

"Let them laugh!" Belinda said.

"I haven't been brought up that way. I couldn't stand it. Everybody's family has a skeleton in it."

"Mine has always been worn outside," said Belinda, laughing. "Come,—let's take ten minutes' run with the heroic Morfido. It will freshen us both up. I thought you disliked me, cousin Claudia."

"I did," said Claudia, as the two girls went

down in the elevator; "that is, I disliked you because you are a poor relation, and a poor relation is always in the way."

"Thank you!" said Belinda, flushing, "you will not find me in your way."

"I know that,—I have found that out," said Claudia, "and I have begun to like you;—besides, you have character."

Belinda walked beside her cousin in silence; she was hotly indignant. The day was exquisitely clear and crisp. They increased their pace. Suddenly, as they neared a seat under a magnificent elm, Claudia stopped and caught Belinda's arm.

"There he is!" she exclaimed. "Let us go back!"

XXXVIII.

JEM.

BELINDA caught up Morfido, and the girls turned. A young man was sitting on the bench under the elm, his head buried in his hands.

"Who is he?" asked Belinda.

"My brother, if you must know," said Claudia, fiercely. "I intended to tell you about him," she added, more gently. "He broke into the flat last night."

Belinda stood still.

"A Deresby, my cousin, a thief!"

"Not at all!" said Claudia proudly. "He never stole anything in his life. I am astonished that you should think that Jem is like that! How I wish I could earn something for him! If it had had not been for that horrid little dog, he would have had something to eat at least."

"What has he done?"

- "Oh, only made a fool of himself,—that's all!" said Claudia, bitterly, "and people in our position never forgive that."
- "Why can't I speak to him, then?" demanded Belinda stopping. "He's my cousin!"
- "Do you really want to? He's very poor, and dressed like a tramp."

Belinda went back towards the elm tree.

"I don't care how poor he is, if he has done nothing wrong."

Claudia followed her.

- "Jem ran off and married without telling any-body. None of the family will speak to him,—not even Arnold. He has a wife and a little boy, named Claude after me. He is just out of college. He had some work to do, but Aunt Gill-flory went and made the business people discharge him. She says that if we shun him and his wife long enough, he'll have to give her up, because she is not of our class. Then she can be provided for, and he left free."
 - "He never can be free!"
 - " People seem to think he can."
 - "Marriage is for always!"
 - "Oh, you're a Catholic! of course you think so.

I wish Aunt Gillflory was more of a Catholic, and then she'd think so, too, and help poor old Jem. His wife is very sweet and a Catholic too, and the little boy looks like me."

"Claudia," said Belinda, her eyes flashing, "we must bring Mrs. Gillflory to her senses! Cousin Jem may have been wrong, but he is right now. He cannot leave his wife and child."

"I wish that I could feel as sure of things as you feel," said Claudia, "it must be a great consolation."

"I have no doubt as to what is right or wrong. Father Belford used to say that there's one thing you can't say against Catholics;—you can't say we are not *certain* and *sure*."

"It helps. Some people we know are divorced and married, and some people want Jem to be divorced; but he will not. Oh, he is so poor!"

"He is strong and well. He can work."

"You speak of these things so energetically," cried Claudia. "It is not so easy to get work when one's people are against one. If Arnold should see me speaking to him, he'd tell Mrs. Gillflory and—"

"Arnold!" cried Belinda, contemptuously,

"Arnold! I'd like to see anybody on earth that could prevent me from speaking to my brother,—no!" added Belinda, after a short hesitation, "even if he drank."

"Jem doesn't drink," said Claudia, indignantly.
"Let us hurry and speak to Jem;—Arnold will come this way to luncheon soon."

"Who cares?" said Belinda.

"I do very much," said Claudia, looking around uneasily.

Jem Deresby raised his head as the girls approached. He had a kind, frank face; eyes like Claudia's, not so large, but more expressive of keenness. He was rather too pink and white, Belinda thought, but she liked his looks. He wore summer clothes and a Derby hat, rather faded, but carefully brushed. His face brightened when he saw Claudia. He rose and bowed.

"Our cousin, Belinda Murray," Claudia said, smiling.

It always pleased her to meet her favorite brother, and she was at her best in his company.

"I am glad to see you," said Belinda, smiling, determined to put everybody at ease, "and how are Mrs. Jem and Claude?"

Jem's face was positively illuminated.

"So Claudia has told you? My wife is well, though she has to endure a great deal because I'm such a poor beggar, and the baby's almost as pretty as Claudia. I'm sorry I made such a row last night, but Claudia said that she would get some things for my wife and the baby, and she told me to run up on the kitchen elevator and get them. I did; but I trod upon a dog, and I nearly got a pistol ball, as well as the big can of jelly and the stuff for the baby Claudia left there."

"I haven't much to give. Jem knows that," said Claudia, sadly. Then she gave an affrighted look over her shoulder and hastened away without a word.

Belinda looked backward, to see Arnold and Mrs. Gillflory coming down the walk. As yet they had not seen her.

"Go,—go!" said Jem. "I came here on the chance of seeing Claudia and telling her that I appreciate her kindness. If you do not go my aunt will make your life a burden."

"Let her try it," said Belinda, composedly. "I will apologize to nobody for speaking to my own

cousin. If Mrs. Gillflory objects to my friends, she can engage a new secretary. Working for one's living has some advantages, after all."

Jem laughed.

"There isn't a friend of mine who would advise me to run away when I'm doing no wrong!"

Jem stood, politely holding his hat in his hand.

"I know now that I did wrong in marrying at college," Jem said. "Alice did not know that my people objected; but I never thought," there was a little break in his voice, "that my parents and Arnold, who had been so kind to me all my life, could have,—well,—been so unkind, though I don't say I didn't deserve it."

Arnold approached Belinda. Taking off his hat but not noticing his brother, he said,—"Your aunt wants you at once, Belinda!"

"Oh, tell Mrs. Gillflory that I am talking to my cousin. Ask her not to wait; I shall be at home presently with all the news about her nephew's wife and the baby. Don't wait;—I am not going yet."

Arnold stopped, as if petrified.

- "Did you hear what I said?"
- "Perfectly," said Belinda, "and," she added,

suddenly flaring up, "I hope that you'll never speak to me again,—genius!"

Arnold went off as if he were propelled by a superior force.

"You are in for it!" said Jem, admiringly.
"But they'll make your life a burden."

"I don't think they will," said Belinda. "If I stay they will find that I can defend myself. I like a fight," she said, "when I am in the right! But don't think I am ungrateful to Aunt Gillflory;—she has been spoiled, and a little respectful truth-telling will not hurt her; she has been too rich all her life, and she's never suffered. Of course I'll be respectful,—I have to examine my conscience every night—"

"You're like Alice!" said Jem, smiling.

"But all the same, I will tell her the truth.
Where do you live?"

"It's a poor place," said Jim, reluctantly. "I would like Alice to know you, though."

"I'll come, and bring Morfido," she said, as he gave her a card on which his address was written. "Why could not Claudia have taken the jelly to you, instead of making you take the risk of going up to the kitchen?"

"She wouldn't dare to come;—and, besides, I wanted to see her. I shall not try it again; your hideous little dog stopped that."

"Dear Morfido! I shall take him to see Claude. Good-bye, cousin!"

Jem made his best bow, and his heart was lighter than it had been for many a day. He was only twenty-three, and he had not learned to bear the results of his own mistakes with patience.

Belinda held Morfido tight, as she went up in the elevator. She was ready for the conflict; but she was not so brave as she seemed to be; and, then, she was afraid that she might be driven to say something disrespectful to Mrs. Gillflory. To be sure, Mrs. Gillflory was only her aunt in some distant way; but she was older, and, though Belinda considered her mental qualities to be of no higher order, yet she knew that she was proud to a certain observance of politeness, at least.

To keep up her courage, Belinda whistled an air, as she washed her hands and gave her collar a resetting.

Everybody was at luncheon. Claudia was very white, Arnold looked scornful, and Mrs. Gillflory very dignified.

"What horrible tune were you whistling, you insolent girl?" asked Mrs. Gillflory.

"I'm sorry I whistled; I caught the habit when I was young; I know it is unladylike; I generally whistle when I am surprised."

"Surprised!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory, "surprised! I am shocked, dumfounded. And you're 'surprised!"

"Surprised that you should treat a poor, unfortunate boy as you are treating my cousin," said Belinda, determined to be cool at all hazards. "But suppose I reserve this discussion of your conduct until after luncheon; it will take away your appetite now. You had a pleasant evening?" she said, addressing Claudia.

Mrs. Gillflory gasped. Claudia was too astonished to answer.

"You ought to be ashamed to speak to my aunt in that fashion," began Arnold. "Jem—"

"I know all about Jem," said Belinda. "Jem, though not a genius, is a gentleman; and, when I am free from my duties here, I shall go to see his wife and the baby."

"You shall not," exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory.

"I am not paid for my leisure time, Mrs. Gill-flory, and I shall certainly go to any proper place. My cousin's house is a proper place. I am surprised that you, whose good heart everybody speaks of, should let your own nephew and his wife," here Belinda's voice shook, "and his beautiful little baby—starve."

Belinda suddenly lost her voice, began to cry, and left the table.

Mrs. Gillflory frowned; she half rose, then she turned fiercely to Claudia and Arnold.

"It's your fault," she said, "all your fault! If you had had the courage of that child, Jem's wife and baby would have been looked after long ago; but you know I'm rich, and you know every whim of mine, good or bad. You'll gain little by it—I can tell you that!"

"Oh, aunt! aunt! I am so glad!" exclaimed Claudia, putting her arms around Mrs. Gillflory. "You don't know how brave Jem has been, under it all. And he always liked you so! And they say his wife is the nicest little thing."

"I don't believe it," said Arnold, sullenly, "Jem's married beneath him, and he ought to

be made to divorce his wife, for the sake of the family. You'll regret this, Aunt."

"Belinda says that Roman Catholics do not believe in divorce," said Claudia, fearing that Arnold's words might have some effect. "And you're a Roman Catholic."

"Of course I am," said Mrs. Gillflory, "and I'm proud of it. We're among the oldest Catholic families in this country. To be sure, I'm not very practical, but a woman in society has such little time for religion. I will not have people say I am hard-hearted. Where did Belinda hear that, I wonder? And, Arnold, I will not have her offended. Her work this morning shows that she's the best secretary I have ever had; she corrects my spelling, and never speaks about it. I'd rather take Jem and all his family in than lose her; I'm so dependent!"

XXXIX.

AN ACCUSATION.

ARNOLD came into the drawing-room before dinner. He was in evening dress, and he wore an orchid in his buttonhole. Belinda was sitting under the central lamp, reading her French History. Arnold took a long look at himself in one of the glass panels of the room, and complacently smoothed his upper lip, where a mustache was beginning to grow. Belinda nodded to him, and went on with her book.

"A novel?" he said, patronizingly. "Something light, I suppose. By the way, I am thinking of writing a musical novel, after the manner of 'Charles Auchester,' myself."

"Indeed?" said Belinda, determined to be merely polite; but she forgot this in her interest, in her French subject. "If I ever write a novel, it will be founded on the French Revolution."

"Indeed?" he said, incredulously. "That will require a great deal of study."

- "I propose to study—not to begin to do things before I know how."
- "Naturally. You will have a hero, of course, how would I do?"
- "Not at all," Belinda said, putting down her book, and entering the fray. "I should make my hero very different."
- "Let me tell you, Belinda," he said, dropping his patronizing air,—"that your tongue is too sharp for a girl."
- "Perhaps it is; I have been told so before; but why do you force me to use it? I will not be patronized by you; I will not pretend that I like your imitation music. Why can't you do honest work, as a straight boy should?"

Arnold reddened.

- "Boy!" he exclaimed. "I am going out to dine with some of the best people in New York, who do not treat me as a 'boy."
- "I don't care anything about that. It is not what people think of us but what we honestly think of ourselves that ought to count. You must know that you can never do anything if you don't work."
 - "You meddle too much in family affairs, and

you are too personal," Arnold said, in an angry tone.

"I don't want to be personal. I thought I was among people who were so cultivated that they would not be personal, but it is altogether different. I can't be gentle in an atmosphere like this."

Arnold went into the hall, to return with his top coat on, and his opera hat in his hand.

"Tableau number two," Belinda said to herself; but she had strength of will sufficient to suppress the observation.

"I just came back to say that it would be well for you to keep out of Jem's affairs. You are only a distant cousin, anyhow. Mrs. Laffan is your mother's cousin, and yet you call Mr. Laffan your uncle and Mrs. Gillflory your aunt. We Deresbys are nearer, of course; but not so near as to give you a right to meddle."

"Mr. and Mrs. Laffan asked me to call them 'uncle' and 'aunt,' and Mrs. Gillflory insists upon it. I should be ashamed to know that my brother is *starving*; I should be more than ashamed to wear an orchid and to go out to splendid dinner-parties, if my little nephew was starving too!—now there!"

Belinda's dignity collapsed; she took up her book, to hide her tears.

"I'm not an intruder; I have been asked to be as one of the family. I hate you, Arnold Deresby!"

"Christian sentiment!" exclaimed Arnold, drumming on the chimney-piece with his fingers. "I don't think that the dollar I've paid for this orchid would help Jem much."

"You—you don't know what a dollar is to a poor man. I've lived among poor people; I know."

Arnold looked uneasy,—for a few moments he forgot himself.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I don't want you to do anything, except to be kind and true. You're sneering at me,—you are thinking that I am not kind; but I'm true."

"Frank, no doubt. It seems to me, Belinda, that you might be less hypocritical. If you think so much of being kind to Jem,—if you hate gambling as much as you say, why didn't you give him the hundred dollars you put up, so that Inez Fawcett and you might rake in a lot of money at bridge?"

"I didn't!" cried Belinda, standing and facing Arnold.

"I saw the check; Inez showed it to me this afternoon. If you can stake money in that way, you'd better help your friend, Jem. High sentiments are all very well; but, when a 'lady' finds fault with other people's playing cards for money, and tries to get a big interest in a gambling game for herself, she ought not to talk against the evils of society!"

Arnold laughed triumphantly.

Belinda was silent. Her first impulse was to tell the truth. Her second was to pour forth a torrent of wrath against Arnold; but how could she? Righteous indignation, under the circumstances, would only appear to him, as hypocrisy; and she had promised Inez not to tell.

"When your 'aunt' hears it, there will be a row."

"When Mrs. Gillflory hears it, I will have an explanation!"

"Your imagination will have to be very vivid.

Let me advise you not to lecture others,—not to preach so much,—not to teach so often. It is much better to play cards for money than to try

to win money on the sly,—and then to deny it!"

Belinda did not speak. All this was very bitter to her.

"If you ask Inez—" she began, as Arnold moved to the door.

"Inez showed me the cheque, I told you."

Belinda felt that he would have been delighted to see her humiliate herself in some way. She prayed for patience, and held her tongue. She stood up silent, until he had gone. Then she went to her room, tothink. Apparently she was a hypocrite and, she shuddered, a liar. Arnold had almost said that word. Well, she must bear it. She said a prayer before the picture of the Madonna. The gong sounded. With a heavy heart, she went back to the dining-room.

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XL.

THE CLIMAX.

MRS. GILLFLORY was in a bad humor. A set of menu cards for a luncheon had been sent home, but they did not suit her. Belinda had gone off to Mass, and, at ten o'clock, had not returned. To Claudia's despair, she had forgotten all about Jem. She was in the breakfast-room,—Morfido beside her, tied up in pale-blue ribbons, to match hers,—and Claudia was standing by the window, hoping that Belinda would arrive.

Belinda, under the impression, that there was nothing for a secretary to do that morning, was taking her own time. She had gone to confession to Father Belford. After Mass she had a long and strengthening talk with him. Then she had gone over to see all the Leos, who were growing very fast. Father Belford had given her a short "Life of St. Teresa" and advised her, with a smile, to hold her tongue.

"I am always nice with nice people," she said, apologetically, "but these society people try me very much."

Father Belford laughed. "They are not so very different from other persons, only they have less to do. Don't be critical, and, on the other hand, don't be frivolous. And don't attempt to teach, except by example, until you are very strong yourself."

Unfortunately, while Belinda was out, Mrs. Gillflory, looking for an object on which to expend the anger caused by her disappointment about the luncheon cards, fell upon Arnold, who was trying a new composition of his on the piano.

"Your father will never pay me back this tailor's bill; it's outrageous!"

Arnold left the little white-enamelled upright piano that stood in the alcove at the end of the breakfast-room, and looked at the bill.

"I wonder why they always send in big bills in the morning when people are in a bad humor," he sighed.

"It's an outrage; if you're going to spend

money this way you ought to earn it," said his aunt.

- "If I were like your precious Belinda, I'd earn enough money to have other people gamble for me."
- "Oh, Arnold!" said Claudia. "Do you really mean to tell?"
- "Well, it's out now;" Arnold was ashamed of himself. "She's meddled in our affairs, and I'll teach her a lesson."
 - "I wan't to know what you mean, Arnold?"
- "I mean that Belinda goes halves with Inez Fawcett in the evenings at bridge, that's what I mean!"
- "It's infamous!" said Mrs. Gillflory. "Infamous! A poor unknown girl playing cards for money. It's awful!"

Claudia darted looks of indignation at her brother.

- "If we risk our money, I do not see why Belinda should not do it!" said Claudia.
- "We!" cried Mrs. Gillflory, "we! We can afford it."
- "Some of us cannot. I know girls who are just desperate because they cannot pay their

losses; and others who buy most luxurious things, quite beyond their means, when they win. After all, Belinda is right, this rage for gambling is bad!"

"You've become a convert since you've lost, I suppose," said Arnold. "You ask Belinda about the cheque, Aunt!"

"I did not think Arnold would have done it!" said Claudia. "Jem would have cut his hand off first."

"I don't care about Jem. Here's Belinda!"
Belinda came in, looking very cool and comfortable and unconscious.

"My luncheon cards are all wrong, Belinda," began Mrs. Gillflory, "and, if you stay so late at Mass, I shall have to forbid you to go;—I never have time to go myself. Look at them! I had arranged to have eight cards, each with the coat-of-arms of a guest; but, look! they're so queer, lop-sided or something."

Belinda obeyed.

The pictures were badly drawn and as badly colored.

"It is too late to repaint them; the heralding is bad, too."

"Oh, dear, what shall I do?" Mrs. Gillflory's voice could not have been more pathetic if she were threatened with instant exile to the Dry Tortugas.

"I have a set in my desk," Belinda said, putting in practice Father Belford's precepts. "One of the girls at the convent painted them for me. They're pictures of little children, copied, I think, from Boutet de Monvel's pictures; they're lovely; I will go to get them."

In her heart Belinda disliked to give these precious cards to Mrs. Gillflory. The set had been used at the last breakfast of her class at the convent, and these were the replicas. However, she gave them up, with a sigh, and by way of reparation for any impatience she had shown to Mrs. Gillflory.

"Ah, charming!" exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory, examing the ten cards, through her lorgnette. "They are so novel! They certainly have great taste in these convents. You have saved me, Belinda. Now run to my desk and answer the business letters you'll find there. Be sure to put the signed cheques in the right letters!"

Claudia looked at her aunt, much relieved.

"Oh, I don't intend to speak of the Inez Fawcett affair until I am in a very bad humor some day. I'm all heart. If not angry, I can never scold anybody!"

Mrs. Gillflory and Claudia went to a fashionable lecture at twelve o'clock. Belinda was well into her work when Inez Fawcett, in an enormous lilac-colored hat, with plumes to match and a tan-colored coat and gown, very intricately embroidered, came in. She did not attempt to kiss Belinda, who was in the act of folding an envelope. Three large cheques had not yet been inclosed.

Inez looked over her shoulder.

"Three hundred dollars!" she exclaimed. "I wish to heaven I had three hundred dollars!"

Belinda saw that she was pale and worn.

"I've lost your money," she said. "Arnold got the cheque cashed for me, and I lost it, and more. Don't talk to me! I know I'm a wretch; but, then, you're not in actual want."

"I don't mind the money," Belinda said, "but I wish you would tell Mrs. Gillflory; she may think—she may think—" Belinda checked herself. She would not reveal Arnold's ungentlemanly conduct.

"Oh, I'll tell Mrs. Gillflory, if that's all you want. There's a row in the kitchen; that precious beast of yours is in trouble again, I suppose. Here, let me inclose these cheques; they will be in time for the mail."

Belinda listened. She did not hear any noise; but there was no knowing what Morfido might do; so off she went.

"I'll mail your letters for you," Inez called out. When Belinda returned to her desk, Inez had gone.

Belinda had found a slight mistake in the household accounts; by reference to one of the letters received that morning she corrected it. It was somewhat difficult, and so preoccupied was she that she forgot all about Inez's visit until it was time to take her walk before luncheon. She found Jem Deresby on the seat in the Park. He stood up and smiled when he saw her.

- "Where's Claudia?" he asked, smiling in a most friendly way.
 - "Out with Mrs. Gillflory."
- "Oh, then," he said, in a relieved tone, "she couldn't come. You've done me a great favor."
 - "About the telegram?" Belinda asked, very

much pleased. "Did you hear from Mr. Laf-fan?"

"Yes,—this morning. It ran: 'Come at once. Place secured. Not convenient to send money by telegraph; Belinda can give you fifty dollars!'

Belinda's face changed; she almost wrung her hands.

"But I can't. You see I remembered that Mr. Laffan, I always call him 'uncle,' you know, had said that a young man of good conduct and education was needed to take care of the Orme estate, while the Ormes are abroad. There is a fine house for his family—so I thought that it would suit you; and I telegraphed to Mr. Laffan yesterday;—I'm so glad, but,—oh, dear!—I haven't the money."

"You gave it to Inez Fawcett, I know, for some good purpose. I saw Inez come out of your flat about an hour ago; she had a cheque in her hand. I'm sorry we did not meet earlier. I fancy that a poor society girl, like Inez, must be very hard up at times. I tell you these girls who have never learned to work are the most wretched creatures in the world!"

"I have learned that," said Belinda, "and I

have resolved to learn something well, something that I can do perfectly;—but I did not give Inez a cheque to-day."

"She had taken one out of an envelope; I observed that she put some letters in the box near your entrance, and passed quickly to the car. I shouldn't have noticed this if I had not been looking for Claudia."

Belinda was uneasy in a vague way; she wished that she had posted Mrs. Gillflory's letters herself.

- "Suppose you come up with me to your aunt; she is not angry now."
 - "Really?"
 - "Really."
- "A miracle!" said Jem, laughing. "You are a good fairy."
- "Show her the telegram, and perhaps she will lend you the money."
- "I would not ask her," replied Jem, his face darkening.
- "Oh, I wish I hadn't given her the money; I wish I hadn't!" said Belinda, forgetting her self-control in her regret.
 - "But you said you didn't.

"I did not give her money to-day," answered Belinda, flushing.

"You gave it to her before, and promised not to tell! I see!" said Jem, his eyes growing keener. "I know Inez. Like half the girls in her set, she is either losing or winning money all the time. I'd rather see Alice dead than do that sort of thing! It is ruining lots of nice girls. I understand about the money. You needn't tell me!"

"I haven't told you. It was a question of honor," said Belinda, distressed.

"I will go with you to Aunt Gillflory and have it out. You've got me my one chance; and, for the sake of Alice and the baby, I'll put my pride in my pocket."

Belinda and Jem paused in the corridor after they left the elevator.

"Are you afraid?" Belinda asked, smiling a little.

"I must say I am," Jem answered, "afraid of my temper, if Arnold is there."

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom," quoted Belinda.

"I'll remember it," Jem said.

The door of the drawing-room was open. Mrs. Gillflory, in her bonnet and coat, was evidently very indignant. Claudia was near her, in street dress, too; her face was white and frightened. A man stood near the door, holding a cheque in his hand.

"I am sure," he was saying, as Belinda came in sight, "I can't help it, Mrs. Gillflory. This cheque of yours was presented at the bank a half hour ago, with a forged indorsement. I'm here to arrest the guilty party, in your interest and that of the bank!"

"Belinda!" screamed Mrs. Gillflory. "Oh you wretched girl! This comes of your learning to gamble."

The man turned and approached Belinda; she seemed about to faint.

"Excuse me, sir," Jem said, coming between him, and the trembling girl, "I have something to say."

XLI.

THE END.

MRS. GILLFLORY, who was a person of many moods, due to an uncontrolled and impetuous girlhood, threw herself into Jem's arms at once.

"Oh, Jem!" she cried, "you are just in time. I need somebody to explain matters. Belinda, why did you back Inez Fawcett at cards? And I trusted you with all these cheques!"

"Belinda has nothing to do with this," said

Jem. "If this gentleman—"

"I am a private detective in the employ of the Oriental Bank, sir," said the man. "This is a case of deliberate forgery. The cheque, as you see, is made out to the tailors, Muller & Co. It is indorsed by somebody who received the money. Our paying teller was taken suddenly ill, as he was about to pay the cheque. He has fits of vertigo lately. The cheque was held by a young woman, who hurried away as soon as she saw

him fall. She tried to rescue the cheque, which he held in his hand. He did not recognize her."

"A young woman!" exclaimed Jem. "I think I know who she is, but it is a mere suspicion."

"In the meantime, as Mrs. Gillflory seems to think that this young lady is guilty, I shall have to give her into custody."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Claudia. "She is entirely innocent!"

"Let us see," said the detective, with a stern, cool glance at Belinda, who had regained her calmness. "This young lady——"

"Miss Murray," said Jem, haughtily, "and be careful that you speak of her respectfully!"

"This young lady," continued the detective, looking as if he would have liked to lay violent hands on Jem, "plays cards, it seems."

Jem laughed.

"She has evidently lost money. She has had charge, I gather, of Mrs. Gillflory's affairs. She has been out; she has just returned, and I have the cheque with a forged indorsement. You can draw your own conclusions."

"I have drawn mine, sir," said Jem, "and they are not yours!"

"Oh, Belinda, Belinda, why did you do it!" exclaimed Claudia. "Surely Mrs. Gillflory would have given you the money you and Inez lost!"

"I would not!" snapped Mrs. Gillflory. "It's all due to this gambling mania, which I will not encourage again; I'll take to ping-pong. I suppose that I'll have to pay to keep this young forger out of jail. Oh, the disgrace of it all!"

Belinda stood up very straight. They were against her; they,—except Jem, whom she had known only for a few hours, believed that she was a criminal;—well, let them!

"No, Mrs. Gillflory," she said, "I will go to prison, and await my trial."

"Will they call me as a witness?" cried Mrs. Gillflory. "Will they take me into a horrible court? Shall I be dragged between two policemen to the city hall?"

"Probably," said the detective, coolly. "You are one of the principal witnesses in this affair!"

"Belinda!" screamed Mrs. Gillflory, "you are an ungrateful, unkind, deceitful girl, to bring all this on me! You shall not go to court and have me with you; I'll buy this man off."

"You flatter yourself, ma'am," said the detec-

tive, flushing. "You may be rich, but you can't buy me."

"This is dreadful, Claudia! He can't be bought. What are we to do? Speak; don't be an owl!"

Belinda stood, very white and still, facing Mrs. Gillflory. She understood now what her grandmother and the Sisters had meant when they had, time after time, commanded her to control herself, to think of others, to be gentle and thoughtful. She pitied Mrs. Gillflory, and, even in her agony,—for the knowledge that she was suspected, that she was in danger of being imprisoned was the keenest agony,—she was glad of the education that had made it impossible for her to be unlike this very fashionable woman.

"Cousin Jem," she said, "surely everybody,"
—she was thinking of the Laffans and Frederick
and Bob,—"will not believe this?"

"No reasonable person will, after I have had my say," called out Jem, who rolled up his sleeves, as if he were in for a boxing match.

"You'd better say it—quick!" said the detective, with a sneer.

"I'll say it when I'm ready--"

"It will get into the papers, with my picture, and I take a horrid photograph!" wailed Mrs. Gillflory.

"I'll say it when I'm ready, and for the last time," went on Jem. "You keep a civil eye in your face—do you hear. This young lady did not forge the indorsement."

"Nobody else could have done it," said Mrs. Gillflory. "Nobody had access to the cheques but her. You know that, Belinda!"

"If you show me where your telephone is, I'll call a carriage and take this young lady away at once. She must answer for this."

Belinda's breath came and went in gasps.

"You shall not take her out of this house," said Jem. "Sit down, Belinda, sit down, I say, please! Aunt, don't stare there,—get the child a glass of water! Don't you see she is fainting,—stupid!" to Claudia.

"I am not fainting," gasped Belinda. "No, I am not fainting! But, oh, a prison, Cousin Jem; what would poor grandmother say? Oh, can nobody save me?"

Claudia made her drink a glass of water.

"But I'll go! I'll go! I am innocent, and

God will not desert me. I must go, Cousin Jem!"

"You shall not go," said Jem, very gravely and gently this time. "If you will let me use your telephone, Aunt, I'll call up Miss Inez Fawcett."

"I cannot stand another scene," said Mrs. Gillflory, fanning herself violently. "There's no use in having Inez here."

"She will be here in five minutes," said Jem, "if she will come at all."

"It's a loss of time, as the lady says," grumbled the detective.

"Permit me to judge. Stay where you are," Jem added to Belinda, "and don't worry."

The telephone bell tinkled twice. They waited.

"You do not mean to accuse Inez, Jem!" exclaimed Claudia, horrified.

"Inez will speak for herself. She has answered my telephone; she is at home, and she will come."

Belinda was very wretched. Now, more than ever in her short life, she understood the value of prayer,—of faith. She must trust in God, knowing that He would save her. Afterwards she remembered that the stories of the manner of her heroines of the French Revolution

had occurred to her. How well the Princess Elizabeth had stood the test. She would endure everything with dignity and tranquillity and inward trust.

There was a long delay, during which Mrs. Gillflory asked the detective to have refreshments. The man took a cup of coffee and looked very important.

The bell rang, and when the door was opened, Inez Fawcett appeared. She was flushed and frightened. She drew back as she saw the detect-tive.

"What is the matter?" she cried. "From the urgency of that telephone message, I expected to find everybody dead."

"I am sorry that this gentleman insisted on troubling you. It is needless," the detective said. "A cheque was offered at our bank this morning with a forged indorsement."

Inez became very pale, and sat down.

"Our paying teller, who has just returned from a hospital, received the cheque. He was seized with vertigo just as he was about to examine it. He could only say that it was presented by a well-dressed young woman; there was nobody in the rotunda of the bank at the time, except myself, and I was engaged at the cashier's window. The cheque was drawn by Mrs. Gillflory for a firm of tailors. The indorsement was an imitation of their signature."

- "Well," asked Inez, "well?"
- "I am simply explaining the reason why I am here."
- "But that does not explain the reason why I have been brought here." Inez did not look at Belinda; she addressed herself to the detective defiantly.
- "Did you not borrow money of Belinda?"
 Jem asked, suddenly.
 - "Did she tell?" asked Inez, scornfully.
- "No! she did not tell; but I found out," Jem said. "I'd like to have five minutes' talk with you in another room, if you don't mind."

Inez rose languidly, but sat down again.

- "I prefer to talk here. Nobody accuses me of forging a name?"
- "No, Miss," said the detective, deferentially, "Miss Murray is suspected."
- "Oh!" said Inez, with a shudder. "I'll stay here."

"You took some letters from Belinda to post?"

"Certainly," said Inez, looking at Jem haughtily. "And one was not properly sealed, and a cheque fell out. I suppose you saw that from your seat in the Park, where you are always idling. Well? I sealed the envelope and posted the letters. What do you make of that?"

"There is no use in torturing Inez Fawcett in this way," exclaimed Mrs. Gillflory. "Belinda Murray must go to jail, I suppose. I'll see that she is well fed there, at any rate. That's all I'll do. To think of her bringing all this disgrace on us. It's worse than your marriage, Jem!"

Jem looked at his aunt with fire in his eyes, but said nothing. Belinda admired him cordially, in spite of her own doubts.

Claudia, usually so self-contained, began to sob.

"If you did it, Belinda, say so!" she cried.
"They may let you off!"

Belinda felt utterly cold and sick; she did not speak.

"Belinda came directly to the Park to speak to me," said Jem, "I was waiting for Claudia. She was with me all the time. The only person that came out of your apartments, Aunt, was Inez Fawcett; and that was some time before Belinda came."

"You call yourself a gentleman,—and you spy!" cried Inez. "You always did hate me, Jem Deresby. If I tell the truth about this, you'll be sorry! let me say this! What can they do to Belinda? Nobody got any money. Suppose she did write the tailors' names on the cheque, they can't prove that she stole anything!"

"It is a most serious affair," the detective said, "most serious. This young man can tell all he knows in court. Miss Murray will have to stand an examination."

Jem looked desperate.

"Inez!" he said, appealingly. Inez shrugged her shoulders and turned her back. There was a hard, set look on her face.

"I'm sorry for you, Belinda," she said, going towards her, but not meeting her eyes. "You've tried to be good to me; but it was no use. I'd like to do something for you now;—I haven't acquired the art of loving my neighbor as myself," she added, with a short laugh. "You will

not believe me,—but I'm more to be pitied than you. If I were in your place, it would break my mother's heart; you haven't any mother."

Jem, his eyes moist, took Belinda's hand. "She had no mother!" The words seem to fill the air with a strange pathos. "No mother!" Here she sat, pale, broken, but stately in a way, but only a little girl, after all, with the world and the law against her.

"I wish," she said, her voice trembling for the first time, "that I had a mother; she would understand."

Claudia broke into sobs; Jem kept his place beside Belinda's chair.

"Time's up," said the detective.

Jem faced him suddenly.

"I'm only a boy compared to you," he said, "and I can't fight you with my fists. I know," he added, looking at Belinda, "that I was wrong, and I know that you will respect me less,—and I don't want Alice to know,—but the other day when you came to me in the Park, I was sick of life. I felt that Alice and the baby would be better without me. I had determined to use this," he said, drawing a small revolver from his

coat pocket. "Yes; it is true; I was almost hounded to it; but you came, and you gave me new life. I was saved from—never mind. Now, if anybody tries to take Belinda Murray from this room, he will get a bullet in his brain!"

"Do you know what you are saying?" cried the detective, looking very uneasy and not moving.

Before Jem could reply, there was a violent ring at the door, and a messenger boy appeared with a note for Claudia. She tore it open, and read it. With a great effort, she gave it to Jem, and fell back upon the sofa. The note was in Arnold's hand,—

"Crooks, the butler, has been here to tell me that there is a detective in the house, frightening Mrs. Gillflory. I know what it means. As I was coming home to-day, I met Inez Fawcett, with some letters and a cheque in her hand. She showed me the cheque, and wished she had the money to pay her gambling debts. The cheque was drawn by my aunt to my tailors. I wanted money badly,—so I said, 'the cash will come out of my father, anyhow; I'll indorse this, you can

take it to the bank, and I'll divide. Father will make it all right.' She tried it, I suppose, and she has been found out. I am going away; there is no use in trying to find me. Arnold."

Inez frowned. She adjusted her hat, and fastened her coat.

"Arnold says that I presented the cheque; and you know you cannot prove it," she said, addressing the detective. "How he got the cheque, you will have to find out, too. Belinda knew that all the letters were not sealed; I may have dropped the one with the cheque."

The detective hesitated.

"You had better give me back my cheque," said Mrs. Gillflory. "If your bank wants to keep me as a depositor, you must let this matter drop."

"You will have to see the President," he said.

"The case of your nephew is serious, on his own confession; but I apologize to Miss Murray, and I suppose, I can do nothing more in this matter at present, though my life has been threatened."

He bowed slightly to Mrs. Gillflory, and went out.

"Before I go," said Inez, rising, "I want to

say that all this is due to you, Mrs. Gillflory. You have encouraged us young girls in all sorts of frivolities. Oh, I know I am to blame;—it's people like you who follow all fashions, good or bad, that spoil us. You shall have your money, Belinda, if I sell every ring I have, and, after this, I'll drop being a 'society' girl. I hope you'll forgive me!" There were tears in Belinda's eyes. "You've a good heart, child,—and don't forget me!"

Inez, disregarding the others, walked haughtily from the room; and, then, Belinda, exhausted, almost fainting, went to her room, to kneel for a moment before her Madonna.

* * * *

Belinda spent Christmas, with the Laffans. Jem, his wife and the little Claude were there, too, as well as Morfido, attired in green and holly-colored ribbons, much to the boys' disgust. A pretty present came from Claudia for Jem's baby, a long telegram from Mrs. Gillflory, asking Belinda to come back.

"You are at home, and at peace," Mrs. Laffan said, smiling at the two girls, Marguerite and Belinda. "For a time," Belinda said, "I am at home. I shall go away soon to learn how to work better. Only the idle girls are poor, and an orphan like me must make a home for herself. Since I've read the life of St. Teresa, I do not pray that all obstacles may be removed, but that I may have the grace to remove them!"

"You're a brave girl!" said Mr. Laffan.

"Do you know," and Marguerite gave Belinda a quick look, "I believe that Belinda will be a nun some day."

"I am not good enough," Belinda said, laughing. "When I was with you here, I thought that I was rather good, but my visit to New York has undeceived me. There's a great deal of the old Belinda in me yet!"

"We like you as you are," said Fred, trying to put a huge piece of red candy into Belinda's mouth. "Just as you are."

Morfido squealed, and everybody laughed.

THE END.







